

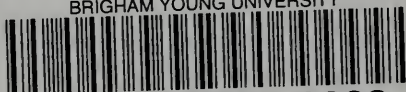
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COLONEL ENDERBY'S WIFE

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COLONEL ENDERBY'S WIFE

A NOVEL

BY

LUCAS MALET

AUTHOR OF

"MRS. LORIMER, A SKETCH IN BLACK AND WHITE"

"Lequel de nous n'a sa terre promise, son jour d'extase, et sa fin dans l'exil?"—AMIEL

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH & CO., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE

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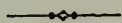
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BOOK FIRST.
FATHER AND SON.

COLONEL ENDERBY'S WIFE.



CHAPTER I.

“LE ROI EST MORT.”

THE house at Bassett Darcy lies low. From around it the well-timbered park rises on three sides, in gentle undulations, towards the stretch of high table-land forming the south-eastern corner of the county. On the fourth side, broad lawns slope down to the banks of the Tull—a quiet, uneventful stream, that wanders indolently through mile after mile of rich meadow land, past osier-beds and alders, and long lines of pollarded willows ; under the wide arches of old brown sandstone bridges ; by villages of quaint half-timbered houses, and spinneys, where the rooks congregate and nightingales sing

in the early summer ; and by waste places—pleasant spots in which Nature has her own way still, and refuses to be put in harness and to labour for the general good of mankind in any more direct manner than by an offering of sweet scents and colours—places overgrown with meadow-sweet, and yellow flags, and pink willow-herb, and tall spikes of purple loosestrife, and docks, and nodding grasses—by these the river wanders to mingle its current at last—some few miles west of the bright little modern watering-place of Tullingworth—with that of the historic Avon, and so find its way to the Severn, and the far distant unknown sea.

The Tull is anything but dramatic. It indulges in no sparkling races over rounded boulders, no splashings into deep pools; no roar and rush, no petulance or bubbling laughter. The steady monotonous repose of the Midlands lies upon it. Like the men and women who live in the green pastoral country beside it banks, it is moderate, neutral-tinted, slow, self-absorbed, and silent. At first sight it appears to be somewhat wanting in individual character. Yet this quiet

midland stream is capable of yielding very pretty effects of light and shade, of form and colour to those who will take the trouble to look for them. And undoubtedly its neighbourhood lends a singular charm to the grounds at Bassett Darcy.

Just below the garden front of the stately Jacobean mansion it makes a sharp curve away to the right, round a thickly wooded spit of land; and, thanks to an artificial widening of the river bed, presents to the eye quite an imposing expanse of smooth shimmering water.

The house itself shares in great measure the restrained and unemotional aspect of the river. It is a large square building of the yellow-brown sandstone of the country; with rectangular windows and doorways, and a low-pitched slated roof, but just visible over the line of the parapet. This style of architecture is singularly innocent of surprises; it is full of solidity and sobriety, and is altogether too dignified to pander to a frivolous taste for the superficially picturesque. The only incident in the serious *façade* at all claiming attention is the great

double flight of stone steps leading up to the hall door. These steps are pleasant to contemplate. There is a generousness about the descending curve of the massive balustrade, and an air of easy hospitality about the broad stairway that proves decidedly encouraging to the guest arriving at Bassett Darcy.

Here the Enderbys have lived for many generations—a strong vigorous race, with but little tendency to dwindle down to an unsatisfactory point in the person of one female representative. There is a certain virility, a healthy coarseness of fibre about most of them, which promises to the fat family acres—even in these thin, eager, somewhat over-civilized times—a long continuance in the possession of heirs male. A mellow canvas in a carved and gilded frame, hanging in the dining-room at Bassett, sets forth in its most agreeable and impressive aspect the true Enderby type. It represents a large fresh-complexioned gentleman in a curled wig, with a round solid head, short nose—wide across the nostrils and slightly inclining to aquiline—a

long, full upper lip, pouting mouth, large lower jaw, with plenty of what—for the want of a better word—one must needs call jowl, and prominent light-brown eyes under slightly arched eyebrows. His neck is thick, and is encircled by a voluminous neckcloth of the finest India muslin. The glint of a steel cuirass shows under his scarlet coat bountifully adorned with gold lace. The picture is by Sir Joshua Reynolds; and, doubtless, “Philip Enderby, Esq., Major-General of His Majesty’s Forces, Colonel of the 204th Regiment of Foot, and Governor of Fort George, in North Britain”—as an inscription runs under a print from the original picture—fared very well at the hands of that most courteous and genial of portrait-painters. You cannot avoid a suspicion that a few too powerful lines have been gently obliterated; that the gallant general’s eyes were not quite so clear, and that his complexion was a few shades deeper in tone. You feel pretty sure that he must have been a man of strong animal passions; straightforward and honest in character, but also not a little obstinate, arrogant, and tyrannical.

A person rather inordinately sensible of his own importance in the universal order of things; kind-hearted, yet disposed to bully and bluster, and eminently unfitted to appreciate the best of jokes, if made at his own expense.

Most of the Enderby men have adhered pretty closely to the above type; and, perhaps consequently, have not created for themselves a very definite place in history. The eldest son of the house has usually gone into the army; but with the exception of General Philip, whose portrait hangs in the dining-room, the Enderbys, until the present generation, have not contributed any conspicuously distinguished soldiers to the service of their country. Perhaps Bassett Darcy is somewhat to blame in this matter, and has helped to check the full development of the family genius. Advanced thinkers tell us that the possession of a perfectly secure social position and the prospect of a comfortable inheritance are apt to paralyze ambition, and strangle those finer emotions which inspire a man to forge his way upward in the world. No doubt it is

“no mean happiness to be seated in the mean ;” but it is a species of happiness liable, they say, to be cherished somewhat to the exclusion of distinct progress and high endeavour.

It may be broadly stated, then, that most of the Enderbys have lived uneventful lives enough ; have mixed freely in the best local society, have married young, ridden hard to hounds, quarrelled hotly over county politics, consumed a very fair portion of first-rate wine ; have been reckoned considerably important—an opinion they were disposed to share in sincerely themselves—within a radius of some twenty or thirty miles ; and when, after a long and usually respectable, if not brilliant, career, Death has called for them, they have prepared—perhaps a trifle unwillingly—to obey his summons, and ascend to some not too spiritually minded or ecstatic quarter of the New Jerusalem.

Occasionally, however, even in the most physically and mentally conservative of races there occurs a sudden deflection from the accustomed type. It is probably only a case of reversion, of a return to an older

strain of blood. Be that as it may, the individual exhibiting these unusual qualities and tendencies appears to have a dash of original genius. He is tempted to emerge, to take a new departure, and, consequently, runs the risk of becoming confusing, if not downright objectionable, in the eyes of his near relations.

It is a case of the kind which forms the basis of this unpretentious chronicle. Scientifically considered, this is the history of a deviation—of a doubtfully successful exception to a safe, though unexciting, general rule.

One evening, towards the close of October, 1876, a peculiar stillness seemed to reign at Bassett Darcy. It was a stillness of expectation rather than of repose; and Dr. Mortimer Symes, sitting in the wide window-seat of the big blue bedroom over the hall, was curiously sensible of the silent pause which penetrated the atmosphere of the large house, and appeared even to spread itself over the face of the serious landscape outside. The rolling pasture land of the park showed a dull green, with a sandy

bloom upon it here and there from the stalks of the withered spare-grass. In the distance long beds of pale mist lay across it, out of which rose the trees and scattered clumps of hawthorn bushes. It was too dark clearly to see the colour of these latter; but you might perceive a warm russet tinge over their dark foliage. Along the top of the hill, just outside the park wall and about half a mile distant, the trees and cottages in Priors Bassett village rose in a dense mass against the sky, the twisted chimneys and gable-ends showing sharp and black against the light behind them. The sky itself, a pale opaque blue, shading into a bank of dove-coloured earth-mist below, was covered to the westward beyond the village, where the bare upland met the skyline, with a fine network of delicate crimson and flame-coloured cloud.

Dr. Symes was given to observation in many departments besides the strictly professional one. He was fond of perceiving analogies and correspondences between natural and spiritual phenomena. He had also cultivated a power of double conscious-

ness; and though acutely aware of every sound that came from the great blue-curtained bedstead, where lay old Mr. Matthew Enderby—his strong vigorous life slowly ebbing, sinking, failing, like the failing day—the doctor was also quite sufficiently unabsorbed to note both the quiet of the house and effects of the waning sunset outside. He wished, if possible, to drive back to Tullingworth that night; but he had half-promised Mr. Jack Enderby to stay to the end. He did not think the end was very far off now; and, meanwhile, he felt quite at liberty to entertain himself with a calm, if sympathetic, observation of his surroundings.

Poor Jack Enderby, on the other hand, sitting at the farther side of the bed, and watching in the growing dimness, was anything but calm. He found himself in the unfortunate position of a man who has a disagreeable message to deliver, and who dreads almost equally the opportunity and the absence of an opportunity for delivering it.

Jack was really an excellent fellow, and, notwithstanding a short, reddish-

yellow beard and a white tie, realized very completely the true Enderby type. He had plenty of pluck—of nothing tangible or material was he for an instant afraid; but not even the influences of his sacred profession had supplied his original lack of moral courage. He went in mortal fear of what is best described as a scene or a situation. There was nothing gloomy, sacerdotal, prophetic, or denunciatory about him; and, unless he happened to be personally offended—like most persons of his complexion, he was a trifle hot-tempered—few things were less congenial to him than admonishing backsliders, pointing sternly to the path of duty, and foretelling the plagues justly following on all wilful hardening of the heart. I am afraid it must be admitted that Mr. Jack Enderby had not any special vocation for the priesthood, and that the exercise, during a period of some twenty years, of his spiritual calling had not made him different, in any sensible degree, to the ordinary run of English provincial gentlemen.

At last there was a movement on the

part of old Matthew Enderby. He shifted his position slightly, and began speaking in a thick unmodulated voice. There was an evident struggle and difficulty about his articulation, and at first the words spoken were barely intelligible.

Jack moved uneasily in his chair, and cleared his throat with a touch of nervousness. He glanced inquiringly up at Mortimer Symes as he did so; but the doctor sat quite still, his high conical head, hooked nose, long shaven upper lip and straight chin, with its straggling and grizzled imperial, silhouetted against the light background of the window. Jack, looking up at him suddenly, was forcibly struck by the eminent medical man's resemblance to a goat; and then felt a little ashamed of himself for having ventured to think of anything at all amusing under existing circumstances.

"The scent's cold," murmured old Matthew Enderby, huskily, "cold—cold. It's no use trying any more. Better give up and get away home. Don't you see, it's getting dark?"

Jack held aside the blue stuff curtain of the great old-fashioned four-post bed, and leant forward.

“Can you hear me, sir?” he asked.

“Yes, I can hear you well enough, Jack,” answered the old man, in the same thick, monotonous voice. “Pity they made a parson of you, Jack; but you’ll have it all your own way soon, parson or not. None of ’em can prevent that. You’re a regular Enderby, Jack—eyes and jaw and all. But the scent’s cold,” he went on, “and it’s getting dark and late.”

Mr. Jack Enderby was one of those easy-going, kindly natured, unimaginative men who are never quite prepared for the deeper and sadder experiences of life. They never get over a sensation of surprise at the neighbourhood of sickness and death. Their own superabundant vitality makes these two things appear so extremely improbable to them. Jack did not certainly love his father with any very exuberant affection; but, as he put it himself, he “felt awfully cut up at seeing the old gentleman lying there,” and this state of feeling made

it all the more difficult to deliver messages which he was pretty well convinced would prove highly unacceptable.

“Never mind about me, sir,” he said, with a certain effort, and speaking as distinctly as he could. “I don’t want you to think about me just now, but about my brother.”

He paused, hoping that the words might awaken a train of sleeping memories, and thereby make what had still to be said easier in the saying of it. But Matthew Enderby’s intelligence—never a very active one—was clouded with the mists of weakness and approaching death. His thoughts, as so often happens just at the close, wandered back to the days of youth and early manhood.

“Brother,” he asked slowly, “which brother? There was poor Darcy, he was drowned at sea; and there was Godfrey—fighting Enderby, they used to call him—never saw a better man with the gloves in my life. He fought a bargee down in Barnwell one Saturday night, and sewed him up so that he couldn’t move for a

month. Bless me! he was a fine fellow; but your mother never liked him, somehow. He hasn't been here this long while. Is he dead too, Jack?" he added suddenly in a sharper tone.

"I didn't want to speak to you about poor Uncle Godfrey, sir," Jack Enderby answered — "not about your brother, but——"

"Ah! he's gone, I remember," interrupted the old man, speaking faster and more clearly. "They're all gone—my brothers and my old friends. God help 'em! you don't see such men nowadays. And Matt's gone. And your mother's gone too, Jack. Ah, dear me!"

The tears came in Jack's eyes, and ran down over his fresh-coloured cheeks. All this was horribly painful to him. He would have liked to say something gentle and comforting to Mr. Enderby at that moment; but a feeling of diffidence, perhaps of false shame, held him back. His relations with his father had always been of a rather rough-and-ready sort. "I wish to goodness Augusta was here," he thought. "Women

are so much better at saying appropriate things than we are."

Matthew Enderby stretched his right arm out stiffly, and felt down over the bed-clothes for the head of an old wire-haired terrier, that lay sleeping, rather uneasily, on the bed beside him.

"They're all gone," he repeated, slowly and sadly. Then he fondled the old dog's head with feeble, uncertain fingers.

Dr. Symes got up from his place in the window. He was a short thick-made man, and limped a good deal in walking. He came across to the bedside, and stood there for a moment, looking narrowly at Matthew Enderby, who lay with his eyes half shut.

"I do not wish to distress you unnecessarily, my dear Mr. Enderby," he said in a low voice, glancing across at Jack, "but I fear the time granted you for speaking—pardon my alluding to private matters—is likely to be limited. I cannot counsel delay." And with that he retired to his seat in the window again.

Jack bent over the bed. As the saying is, he took his courage in both hands.

“Father,” he said, “you remember my brother?—you remember Philip?”

Matthew Enderby opened his eyes, and turned his head sharply on the pillows.

“And what about Philip?” he asked curtly, almost angrily.

“He’s here, sir. He’s downstairs. He came early this morning; but you’ve been sleeping a good deal, and we couldn’t tell you sooner. He wants to see you. Won’t you see him, sir, just for five minutes—just once before——”

Jack stopped abruptly. His words had produced an effect he had not looked for.

Old Matthew Enderby, filled with sudden strength, sat bolt upright in bed, his face firm, high-coloured, passionate as it had ever been in the fulness of his manly vigour.

“I sent your brother Philip out of this house three-and-twenty years ago, and dared him ever to come back to it!” he cried in a loud, vibrating voice. “He broke your mother’s heart. By her death-bed I swore I would never forgive him; and I will never forgive him, never!”

Jack was shocked, pained, altogether amazed. He stood up.

"Upon my word, sir——" he began.

But a rapid change came over Matthew Enderby. He stretched out both arms with a sudden convulsive gesture, as though he was pushing away from him an actual and visible presence.

"Ah!" he cried hoarsely. "Good God! what—what's this?"

Then he fell back heavily against the pillows. The old terrier awoke with a start, and uttering a low whimpering howl, its hair bristling, and its tail between its legs, crouched shivering up against the high footboard of the bedstead.

Dr. Symes came from the window again. He bent down over his patient, and laid his hand on his wrist for a few seconds in silence.

"The end has come even sooner than I had anticipated, Mr. Enderby," he said at last, looking up at Jack, who stood waiting.

The doctor turned his head and glanced at the dog cowering down at the foot of the bed.

“ Singular,” he said, half aloud, and with a slight lifting of the eyebrows, “ very singular indeed.”

Meanwhile, Philip Enderby, the subject of the foregoing conversation, waited, with what patience he could muster, downstairs, hoping for a summons to his father’s bedside. It was melancholy work enough, pacing up and down the gloomy panelled saloon, with its tall rectangular windows, and dark old-fashioned furniture, in the dim twilight. The room had that indescribable odour and chill about it which is wont to haunt rarely used chambers. The outlook from the window was certainly ill-calculated to dispel the depressing influences that reigned within. The white fog hung low and dense over the river, and crept up the sloping lawns towards the house. A black mass of trees—oaks and beeches—rose out of it just by the bend of the stream on the left; and beyond the long flat stretch of the park faded away into misty uncertainty under the growing darkness.

After many years of absence this was hardly a cheerful home-coming for Colonel

Enderby. The place seemed full of ghosts, and ghosts are rarely good company. The Colonel had come back longing for peace, hoping for a final reconciliation which might wipe out bitter memories of the past; but as one half-hour after another slipped by without sound or movement in the large house, and as the evening deepened towards the night, his hopes died slowly and sadly away, and deep disappointment and regret possessed him.

For Philip, though he had knocked about the world more than most men, and was by no means a weak or over-sentimental person, had a great singleness of purpose, and the keenness of feeling which almost invariably goes with singleness of purpose. His experience of life had been of a somewhat stern and practical nature, making demands upon the more sturdy masculine virtues, and giving but small opportunity for delicate self-analysis or self-culture. Yet there was a very genuine vein of poetry in him too—a clinging in thought to this same old home, a deep desire for re-union with his father and his

family, a great capacity for enjoyment of the gentler, quieter, more domestic sides of life. Perhaps the Colonel's reverence for natural, simple, homely joys had only been deepened by a certain denial and thwarting of desire that had befallen him. His emotions were none the less vivid because, so far, they had been voiceless and unsatisfied, kept in check by the hand of unpropitious circumstance.

He had, among other tendencies which people will praise or blame according to their own taste in such matters, an almost quixotic indifference to his own material advantage. Hearing of old Mr. Enderby's serious illness, he came to Bassett, not impelled by any desire to secure a possibly forfeited inheritance, but with the simple purpose of entreating for pardon and for a renewal of affection, before death should have made all such renewal impossible. Good-natured Jack Enderby, with his handsome wife and herd of noisy children, might move over from the ramshackle rectory house at Cold Enderby, and reign at Bassett in peace and plenty,

and Philip would bear them no grudge in the future. All he begged for was an assurance that he was no longer an out-cast, unforgiven, perhaps even forgotten, without place or part in his father's memory. But as time drew on, while the Colonel paced to and fro, stern and silent, in the cold, dusky saloon downstairs, he knew that all hope of reconciliation grew fainter and fainter. He felt sick at heart.

At last there was a sound of footsteps crossing the hall, and of two men talking just outside. Colonel Enderby drew himself up rather stiffly, and stood waiting in the middle of the room.

Dr. Symes entered first, composed and professional, limping slightly, and making a little stumping noise with his gold-headed walking-stick.

"If I might order my carriage immediately, my dear Mr. Enderby, I should be extremely glad," he said, turning to Jack, who followed him into the room. "If you will kindly permit me I will ring at once," he added, moving across as he spoke to the fireplace.

The two other men were left standing opposite to each other. Colonel Enderby looked hard at his younger brother; but it was too dark for him to make out the expression of his face.

“ Well ? ” he asked, rather hoarsely.

“ My dear fellow, it’s all over,” answered Jack, in a broken voice.

The Colonel bowed his head. There was a silence for some minutes. Then Jack Enderby did an extremely unromantic thing. The long watching, and the final scene upstairs had upset him considerably, and his taste at no time was over-refined. He was conscious, too, that his troubles in the way of delivering disagreeable messages was by no means yet over. He poured himself out a couple of glasses of sherry, from a decanter that stood on one of the bare tables, and gulped them down hastily one after the other. His hand shook a good deal; he felt all to pieces, so to speak.

Dr. Symes glanced at him and then at the Colonel, who waited, erect and silent. Notwithstanding certain superficial affectations and vanities, Mortimer Symes was an

eminently kind-hearted man. He was also, as has already been stated, a pretty shrewd observer and something of a diplomatist. He never could see the object of telling people truths of an unpalatable description unless it was absolutely necessary to do so. Just now he perceived that Jack Enderby was screwing up his courage with a view to blurting out information calculated to give acute pain to the living, and reflect no small discredit upon the dead. He decided to intervene.

“The end was extremely sudden, Colonel Enderby,” he said, folding his arms, and speaking with that fulness of utterance which argues distinct satisfaction on the part of the speaker at the sound of his own voice. “A long period of coma, followed by a brief interval of consciousness—the mind even then considerably clouded. An inclination to dwell on the past,—reminiscences of former friendships and interests, an awaking of early impressions, but no active appreciation of immediate surroundings. A momentary flash of the old remarkable vigour, and then,” added Dr.

Symes, extending his hand with a slow downward movement, "a final quenching of the light. Your brother naturally was greatly affected. Even a man like myself, whose professional duties so often bring scenes of this nature before him, could hardly remain entirely unmoved. I need not enlarge on the subject to you, Colonel Enderby, who must so frequently have witnessed death in its most distressing forms, the horror of it aggravated by hideous and repulsive surroundings. Familiarity fails to rob death of its terrors. But I own I am greatly relieved," he continued, with a relapse into an easier conversational manner—"sincerely relieved. With your father's remarkably strong constitution, I had feared a painful struggle at the last. I am thankful to say we were spared anything of that kind."

The Colonel bowed a sort of general assent to the worthy doctor's statements. It would be indelicate, he felt, to ask for intimate explanations before a third person. His native reticence, and an innate dignity which belonged to him, put all further inquiries out of the question.

Jack, meanwhile, was not slow to perceive the way of escape which Dr. Symes' discourse had opened to him. He stifled any conscientious scruples that assailed him.

"I did what I could, Philip," he said, in a slightly apologetic tone. "But it was just as Dr. Symes says. My father wasn't quite himself, you know. He was wandering a good deal, and one couldn't make him understand anything out of the common run."

"No, no; of course not," replied Colonel Enderby.

He spoke as thoroughly accepting the position, and even setting the matter aside; but there was a sharp bitterness at his heart. He was repulsed. His last chance was gone. Philip was not without a measure of pride. He turned away, walked across to the window, and stood looking out into the misty twilight, while the doctor indulged in a series of appropriate and somewhat wordy reflections, to which Jack answered with incoherent monosyllables.—His father was dead, and in dying had given no sign. He himself was

unpardoned. The injustice of the thing, as well as the sorrow of it, cried out in Philip Enderby. He could not bring himself to remain in a house where his coming had been so unwelcome. He turned away from the window, went up and spoke to his brother.

“I must get back to Aldershot to-night,” he said quietly. “I suppose I can catch the night mail at Slowby. I’ll come down for the funeral, of course, if you’ll let me know the day and hour.”

“Oh! but you know, my dear fellow——” began Jack Enderby.

The Colonel interrupted him.

“All right,” he said. “I know you’re very kind, Jack; but, under the circumstances, I had better go all the same, thanks.”

CHAPTER II.

“VIVE LE ROI!”

ON the morning after his father's funeral Philip Enderby was up and out early. He had passed a night in his old home for the first time for over twenty years, and sleep had been difficult of attainment. There was very much to think about; much that was painful; difficult to forgive; to submit to patiently. A sense of unjust wrong is not an agreeable bedfellow. The Colonel was glad enough when the light of a stormy dawn began to glimmer in through his window shutters; he would get up and go out, and try to find good counsel out of doors.

He went downstairs and out on to the head of the steps in front of the door. The old wire-haired terrier got up from his place

on the tiger-skin before the hearth in the hall, and trotted out after him. The dog seemed anxious for notice ; he put his fore-paws up against the balustrade and forced his grey muzzle up into Colonel Enderby's hand with a certain air of inquiry. The old master was gone ; was this the new one ? The Colonel looked down and patted the dog's head for a minute ; then he drew himself up and took a deep breath of the keen moist air. His heart was very full just then.

"I am afraid I am a bit of a fool," he said, half ashamed of his own emotion. "I suppose I didn't know how much I cared for the place till it came to a question of giving it up altogether. It cuts one a little at first."

The gaudy beauty of a wild autumn morning was upon Bassett Darcy. The sky was clear after a night of rain and wind ; a thin, watery blue above, and below almost white, with a flare of yellow light along the eastern horizon. A broken procession of light grey clouds—called of country weather-prophets by the ominous name of

“messengers”—streamed up from the westward and straggled, ragged and dirty, across a bank of darker cloud stretching behind the uplands of Priors Bassett. The trees, roughly stripped of their coloured leaves by the night’s storm, were black with wet and glistened in the sunshine, the coarse grass of the open park looking a raw green. The wind, chill with rain, blew the rooks and jackdaws hither and thither, as they left the wood overhanging the bend of the sluggish river down behind the house. Somewhere among the shrubbery, under shelter of the high red-brick wall of the gardens on the left, a robin was singing a tender lament for the dead summer and for the pain and cold of the long bleak coming winter.

There were sounds, too, from the large block of stable buildings on the right. The murmur of voices, the impatient stamp of a horse, the rattling of pails and tinkle of falling water, and now and again a few bars of some tune, whistled shrilly, came to Colonel Enderby’s ears, as he stood there looking silently at the strange yet familiar

scene. Memories of his mother, of his childhood, of quaint games and imaginings, when the wood by the river was shrouded in delightful mystery, and the river itself seemed full of unknown danger and of promise; when the flower-garden was a sweet enchanted region, and when every natural object possessed a spirit and personality of its own, to be approached with wonder and reverence; when gardeners and grooms too seemed wise with all manner of occult wisdom, men who had a tight grip on fundamental facts, and were not to be deluded by mere appearances; when the keeper, in his gaiters and brown velveteen coat, with pockets big enough to hold a couple of retriever puppies, appeared a wild and daring character, fascinating, yet somewhat alarming also, thanks to his careless disregard of animal life and profound experience in the matter of vermin.—Memories such as these, impressions and associations which had slumbered for years, awoke now in Colonel Enderby. Yes, it is all there, all that has ever befallen us, written with some mysterious kind of sym-

pathetic ink upon the heart and conscience, and needing merely the fated touch which shall restore to the invisible characters their original legibility, and make us live our past lives over once more in pleasure or in pain.

He went down the stone steps, round the end of the great square house, and along the wide gravel terrace with the shrubberies on one hand and the sloping lawns on the other. He had wandered there years ago, on sleepy summer evenings, with his gentle, sweet-faced mother, telling her in shy, half-awkward fashion the story of his first love and of Miss Cecilia Murray's many perfections, while Mr. Enderby sat over his wine in the large dining-room indoors, and the last glow of the sunset faded behind the distant woods.

In that pool yonder, under the alder stump, he caught a two-pound perch in the Easter holidays, the year he went to Harrow; and there was the place, just where the bank shelves into the water, among the rushes and broad dock-leaves, now sere and withered with the chill of

autumn, that he and Matt had seen a couple of water-rats, one Sunday, after afternoon service, and that Spot, the old water spaniel, had missed the last one by a couple of inches. And there:—but the tale would be endless. Each path and bush and flower-bed had its history, simple, yet vivid, sad or merry of remembrance.

And since those far-off yet unforgotten times, the little, ugly, red-legged, blue-eyed boy had grown into a man; had wandered far and wide, had seen strange sights, and passed through strange experiences; his gentle mother had lain these many years sleeping in the churchyard on the hill above; his first love, the fair Cecilia, had married the not too reputable son of an Irish peer, and had drifted away along some quite other road across the land of this life; the old Squire, obstinate and tyrannical to the last, was dead. Philip Enderby himself was middle-aged. He supposed that he had outlived most of his hopes and illusions; and yet the old home was just the same as ever. The rooks still clamoured as they left their nests, and the

fish rose in the lazy stream; robins sang plaintively among the shrubs, men whistled over their work in the stable yard, and the rich, damp, clay soil smelt strong and fresh under the morning sunshine. The individual changes, drops away, and dies, his place knows him no more. Yet nature can always find another bird to sing the old song, and the wind blows as it will through all the long years, and the land wakes glad and fragrant at the kiss of the pale dawn, and plain daily labour goes on steadily, unheedingly, from generation to generation. Birds will sing, stable buckets clatter, and grooms whistle, so one fancies at times, just as usual on the morning of the Last Day itself.

Colonel Enderby, with the old white terrier trotting solemnly at his heels, paced slowly up and down the long walk, thinking of these things. One of the under-gardeners sweeping fallen leaves and twigs off the smooth gravel, stopped his work as he passed by, and took a good long stare at the Colonel. "He'd heered," as he told his wife that evening over his supper, "a'ready,

as Mr. Jack Enderby was come into it all ; but he felt he'd like to know what sort of a looking gentleman the other one was, considering the old Squire was so terrible spiteful agin' him."

Perhaps we may as well take a good look at Philip Enderby, too, as he moves along under the garden front of the stately house in the wind and the morning sunshine, and see what manner of man he is—outwardly, at all events. I am afraid it must be owned frankly, at starting, that he is not at all an obviously romantic figure. The Colonel is turned eight-and-forty, and is not unprosperous looking—facts calculated, in the estimation of most persons, to knock all prospects of romance effectually on the head! Further, it must be owned that at no period of his life has he been reckoned a handsome man. All the same, there is a certain air of distinction about him. He is rather over middle height ; well made and well set-up—broad across the chest and small round the loins ; and possessing, too, even in the undress of a rough shooting-coat and heavy boots, that effect of spotless freshness and cleanliness

that is one of the most notable characteristics of a well-bred Englishman. His features are somewhat large and strongly marked; the nose aquiline, the mouth hidden under a heavy light-brown moustache, the ends of which the Colonel has a habit of pulling downwards in meditative fashion whenever he has anything a little on his mind. His jaw is square and solid; his complexion originally fair, but now tanned and dulled by travel and exposure. His crisp short hair, a darker brown by some two shades than his moustache, is as thick as ever, and still untouched with grey—a fact which, though he is far from being vain, does certainly yield him considerable satisfaction.

Philip Enderby's eyes are the only point in his personal appearance meriting unqualified praise. They are deep-set under straight eyebrows—real fighting eyes of bright blue; the pupil small, the iris large and peculiarly rich and clear in colour. Such eyes are habitually kind and friendly enough; but they can grow very keen and ruthless when the blood is hot and an ugly

day's work has to be done. And our friend here has seen an ugly day's work done more than once in his life. He has seen more than most men's share of battle and horror and death. He looked at them steadily, not without quick movements of pitying wonder and disgust; but chiefly with a stern sense of his own immediate duty, which was to put through the work in hand simply, and even cheerfully, without any careful hesitation or speculation concerning the ultimate ethics of the situation.—This last sentence seems to imply something of harshness and cruelty, I fear; but it may be questioned whether any man will be of much active use in the world who has not a residuum of brutality left in him. In any case, it is certain that in some natures, along with a dash of harshness and cruelty—if one must needs employ such unlovely terms—goes tenderness of heart towards the weak and unfortunate, delicate consideration for friend or kinsman, and a devotion towards chosen individuals so profound and constant that it is almost perilous in its intensity.

The man of this temper who loves—still

more, who loves late—will do it with a terrible completeness. Strength has its dangers as well as weakness. They are touched with dignity and splendour, it is true; but they are too often touched as well with a species of desperation. These simple whole-hearted natures, under the dominion of a fixed idea, are horribly difficult to cope with. Nothing turns them aside. They will go through fire and water, utterly regardless of the well-intentioned remonstrances of the bystanders, to reach the goal, whatever it may be.

In saying this, I do not mean for an instant to suggest that this quiet, dignified, and, alas! middle-aged soldier, Colonel Enderby, was at all disposed just now to run mad upon love or any other matter. The potential possibilities of a character may never be developed in a given direction; but, thanks to circumstances, may remain latent to the end. Far from indulging in exaggeration of feeling or intention, he was calmly making up his mind to accept the inevitable; to part with a hope that, though but half-formulated, had been very dear to

him ; to retire gracefully from a difficult position ; and not only conceal, but, if possible, even forget his own disappointment and injury.

For the Colonel paced up and down that bright morning in front of the house at Bassett Darcy, not as master, but as guest. Old Mr. Enderby had bequeathed all his property—houses, lands, plate, and other possessions—to the younger of his two surviving sons. Philip only inherited that which would have come to him had his elder brother, Matthew, lived—two-thirds of his mother's fortune and a sum of money left, in remainder, to him by name, in his grandfather's will. He would no longer be a poor man, it is true ; but to some persons, even the assurance that in future they are secure of a comfortable balance at their bankers' will not wholly compensate for the subjective discomfort of knowing themselves to be the objects of an undying grudge. This public and practical repudiation on the part of his father was hard to bear. His pride rebelled against it, as well as his heart ; and it was not without a struggle

that the Colonel schooled himself into acquiescence.

As he stood still in the middle of the broad walk, looking away over the river to the wood and the levels of the grass park beyond, something very like tears came into his eyes. There was a depth of very wholesome humanity in the man. It would have been pleasant to him to settle down here, with a wife and children—as Jack was about to do, for instance—to see another generation growing up about him, full of hope and generous ambition; to move on, surrounded by kindly, faithful faces and honest love, towards the inevitable, but undreaded close. He could not help feeling, rather sadly, that he had missed a good deal in life. It was dreary work looking at all this established security and order from the point of view of a homeless old bachelor. Colonel Enderby shook himself, with a queer smile, and turned back to the house again.

“Ah! well, it’s no good quarrelling with facts,” he said, half aloud. “We all get what we’re best fitted for in the long run, I

suppose; and it doesn't pay to cry over spilt milk. Come along, Vic"—to the terrier, who sat on the gravel, still contemplating him with an air of inquiry—"I'm going indoors, like a sensible fellow, to my breakfast."

Mr. Jack Enderby, meanwhile, notwithstanding that at this moment Fortune appeared to woo him with her broadest smiles, was in an unhappy frame of mind. Not that he was troubled with importunate memories, or perplexed by the indifference of universal nature to the fate of the individual or any such high or intimate matter. Jack was safely rooted in the conventional and commonplace, and his perturbations were of a purely concrete order. But he was entirely unaccustomed to feeling more than one thing at a time, and just now he was a prey to many conflicting sensations. He found it dreadfully confusing. Jack's conscience did not accuse him. He knew that he had brought no undue influence to bear on his father regarding the disposition of the property; yet still he was painfully aware of embar-

rassment and discomfort in his elder brother's presence. Not possessing any morbid or ascetic views concerning the inherent value of suffering, it seemed to him a little too bad that he should be so extremely uncomfortable when he was quite innocent of wrong-doing.

He had come to the conclusion the day before that it was incumbent upon him to make Colonel Enderby a handsome and appropriate speech on the subject of the property. But the house had been full of people; there had been a good deal of movement and stir, and, after the funeral, a tendency in the direction of wine and cold baked meats, and general conversation in a rising scale of cheerfulness. Mr. Peter Gamage, the lawyer from Slowby, had stayed to dinner. So had Dr. Symes—not that the latter gentleman had any intention of being bracketed socially with a country solicitor. He stayed for reasons of his own. He happened to have heard some dramatic stories of those terrible years of the Indian Mutiny, and he was anxious to make nearer acquaintance with a man who had been a

not undistinguished actor in them. Dr. Symes had remained, talking to the Colonel, till late. There had really been no favourable opening for Jack Enderby's speech; and as he was not by any means glib, unless he lost his temper, and as he stood in mortal fear of fine talking and heroics, he had not tried very hard to find an opening, since none presented itself unsought.

Now this morning the prospect of that same speech hung over him like a dark and dreadful shadow, while at the same time he was conscious of an elation so lively that it made him wash, put on his boots, and even tie his white tie—Mr. Enderby had an instinct that it would be graceful to emphasize the outward and visible signs of his clerical profession at this juncture—in time to a dashing triumphal march which kept on thumping itself out in his brain.

“Matt can go to Eton,” he thought, “and the girls can have new frocks whenever they want them. Bates says there's no end of first-rate wine in the cellars; and Augusta will look uncommonly well in those diamonds of my poor dear mother's.”

Then he checked himself; grew suddenly serious, thought of Jacob and the birth-right, and of the nasty consequences in some ways of his misappropriation of Esau's blessing; and then of the virtues of the law of entail, and of the sacred institution of primogeniture—for Jack Enderby was a devout Conservative.

"Every stick and stone on the estate shall be strictly entailed on Matt at once," he said, rather illogically.

He pictured the nice string of hunters he would have in those great barrack-like stables before the year was out; then, made another return upon his brother, and wondered what on earth he should say to him.

When the breakfast bell rang at last, poor Mr. Enderby felt anything but gay. The triumphal march died away into silence, and he would have sacrificed a good deal of prospective pleasure in the matter of wine and horses to have avoided the next half-hour.

As Jack, with rather a rueful countenance, came down into the square flagged hall, the Colonel entered it by the front

door, letting a great rush of fresh westerly wind into the house with him. He came forward, holding out his hand to his brother, and looking him very frankly and kindly in the face. There was a fine serenity in his expression as he did so.

“Good morning, Jack,” he said. “I’ve been round the dear old place. I’m glad to find that with all the knocking about the world that I’ve had, I have not forgotten a single thing here. It seems as if I hadn’t been away a day.”

He paused a moment, and then added quickly.

“God bless you, Jack, you and your wife, and the children! Good luck to you, and your boys after you; they’re jolly, plucky little lads, and will keep up the honour of the old name gallantly.”

Colonel Enderby turned away, and went across the hall to lay down his hat.

“You’ll give me a bed now and then,” he said, “won’t you, if I want to get away from soldiering, and have a breath of my native air?”

Jack Enderby was touched, distressed,

relieved, all at the same moment. The number and diversity of his emotions did not tend towards lucidity of thought or expression.

“Upon my word,” he began, “I don’t know what on earth to say to you, my dear fellow. I am in the most awfully awkward position, you know. I’ve been wanting to speak to you seriously ever since this all came out about the property. It isn’t right, you know. It’s infernally hard on you, though I don’t want to say anything disrespectful about my poor father, of course. But, you know, he was very high-handed with me; there was no getting near certain subjects. He was as close and reticent as could be about money matters. I give you my word I hadn’t a notion till the day he died of the way he meant to leave things, and even then he only gave me a hint. I don’t understand it. I tell you, I don’t know how to look you in the face. I feel like—well, upon my word, I don’t know what I do feel like,” he added hopelessly. “It’s most uncommonly awkward for me, and your

taking it all in this wonderfully generous sort of way makes it all the worse, that it does."

Jack's voice grew a little shaky. He was genuinely moved, though his form of utterance was, it must be allowed, somewhat elementary.

The Colonel came across from the table on which he had laid down his hat. His brother's incoherent address had pleased him, and strengthened his willingness to accept the situation unreservedly.

"It's all perfectly right as it is," he answered. "You're cut out for a country squire, Jack—it will suit you a good deal better than preaching, eh? And Augusta is just fit for this sort of thing too. After all, what do I want with a great barrack of a house and an army of servants? There, we quite understand each other, and needn't say any more about it. By the way," he said presently, "it seems to me there is no end of keep on South Park, just across the river, simply wasting. I should put eighteen or twenty beasts on it at once, if I was in your place. I suspect you'll find the estate

wants a lot of looking after at first. Things must have been a good deal neglected, since my father's not been able to get about and see into them himself."

Then the two men went into the dining-room, chatting of stock, and horses, and draining, and kindred subjects. And by the time breakfast was over, the triumphal march was thumping away as merrily as ever again in Jack Enderby's head.

That evening as he stood smoking meditatively, with his back to the library fire, the Colonel said—

"I think I shall get long leave, Jack, and go abroad for a time, when all this business is finally settled. I dare say Edmund Drake would go with me. You know, after all, I have seen next to nothing of Europe."

He turned round and steadied a big log that threatened to fall out on to the hearth with his foot.

"I feel as pleased as a schoolboy," he went on, "at having some money in my pocket to play ducks and drakes with."

CHAPTER III.

RETROSPECTIVE.

A BRILLIANT American writer has told us that in order to acquire a really comprehensive and scientific understanding of the personality of any given man or woman, it would be necessary to go back to the garden of Eden, and, beginning with our first parents, to trace the gradual evolution of the individual specimen down through the ages, from the cradle of the human race to the present day. This, doubtless, is strictly true. It is, therefore, all the more a matter for devout thankfulness, that such a course is hedged about with obvious impossibility; for were it not so, there is no saying to what gigantic proportions the biography of the most obscure and uninteresting person might reach! Let me hasten to assure

the reader that it is not for an instant proposed in the present case to peer into the backward abysm of things in this alarmingly voluminous and tedious manner, in the hope of therein discerning the ultimate causes of present effects. The narrator only desires, with all attainable brevity and conciseness, to make a few statements which may serve to throw some light upon the fortunes and conduct of certain actors in this little drama.

When Philip Enderby was about two-and-twenty an event took place which very sensibly affected his subsequent career. He discovered one fine day that he was very deeply in love—in love, too, with a young lady whose fortune would be pretty well enclosed by the trunks in which she packed her modest *trousseau*. The young man's tastes were neither showy nor expensive. He had, in fact, been blamelessly economical, eking out his pay as subaltern in a marching regiment, with the slender sum allowed him, rather grudgingly, by his father, and never forestalling quarter-day with inopportune demands for advances. Now he

intimated that an increase of allowance would enable him to marry, and that he wanted to marry very much indeed.

But, unfortunately for poor Philip, he was not, and never had been, a favourite with his father, whose stock of parental affection was rather exclusively bestowed upon his eldest son, Matthew, a handsome, headstrong, blustering fellow. Young Matt had left the university, where he had distinguished himself more in sporting and athletic than in learned circles, very much in debt. His father had just cleared him, so that Philip's love affair and request for help came at a singularly inconvenient season. In vulgar terms, Mr. Enderby didn't see it at all.

“What did that silly fellow, Philip, want with a wife and a houseful of squalling brats at his age?” he asked. “The boy hadn't half enough to do, kicking his heels at one garrison town after another. A little good hard work was what he wanted; that would knock the calf-love out of him soon enough. And then, who the devil is this Miss Cecilia Murray?” he added, not over-civilly. “I never heard of her. Let

Philip take up with some girl with money, in the county, whom we know something about, and then it'll be plenty of time to talk about increased allowances, and so on. If they're so much in love, let 'em wait; that's the only thing I can recommend to 'em."

Lieutenant Enderby and Cecilia Murray proceeded to wait. Poor dears! there was nothing else very possible for them to do under the circumstances, since they were really attached to each other. They waited dutifully during the space of a year. Then the young lady began to lose her good looks a little. She was one of those thin, under-vitalized blondes who do not wear very well. It became daily more evident that waiting did not agree with her physically, though the constancy of her heart might be as great as ever. It was a pity, for Philip was blessed with a large share of patient devotion. He could have waited faithfully for a dozen years for his Cecilia, and sworn at the end of it that she was every bit as pretty as the first day he met her.

Cecilia Murray's mother, however, was a

lady of experience, of resources, and of an eminently practical turn of mind. Her own marriage had not been exactly a conspicuous success, since her husband had added to various other incapacities the incapacity for living long, and had left his wife, as a still young and handsome woman, with a family of portionless daughters on her hands. Mrs. Murray permitted herself no illusions in certain matters. She had realized with disagreeable distinctness that, in the case of a girl having little besides personal attractions to recommend her, time is of supreme value on this side of five-and-twenty.

“With Cecilia’s style of looks, freshness is everything,” she said, with praiseworthy candour.

Acting upon this conviction the good lady did not warmly encourage her daughter’s lover, whose material prospects struck her as lacking in any brilliant promise. She treated the young man with scant courtesy, and had, in fact, prepared to break off the match altogether, when an unlooked-for occurrence caused her suddenly to alter her opinion as to the eligibility of his suit.

It was in the winter-time that young Matthew Enderby, troubled about money matters and thirsty for some fresh amusement, elected to come to the quaint cathedral town in the north, where his brother's regiment was then quartered, and spend a week with him. Matt was in very low water again; his debts were heavy, and he could not make up his mind to tell his father frankly about them. Between horses and dogs, billiards and racing, and little runs up to London, the young gentleman had contrived to get his affairs into a sufficiently desperate condition. The Squire's temper was short at times even with his eldest and best-loved son; and Matt neither relished the idea of embarking in a slightly discreditable confession, or of risking his position of first favourite with his father. He was in the state of mind in which a man is willing to clutch at remote and improbable chances of salvation. Philip was devoted to him, he knew. Philip was a generous fellow and might be able to help him. At worse, Philip could be coaxed into breaking the whole thing to his mother—whose

darling he was—and through her Matt might get the assistance he wanted without the unpleasantness of a personal statement. Filled with these vague hopes and round-about intentions, he started on his pilgrimage to the northern city; but once there the desire to cut a figure, win admiration, and get himself talked about, returned upon him to the exclusion of more prudent considerations. The week of his stay extended itself into three, and during those three weeks Matthew Enderby might certainly congratulate himself on having made a mark—of a kind.

One night, or rather, early one morning, the two brothers, and a young fellow-officer of Philip's, Beaumont Pierce-Dawnay, by name, were returning from a somewhat uproarious bachelor's dinner-party at a neighbouring country-house. Matt had taken more wine than was good for him; he had played cards and lost heavily. He was excited and angry, and tried to carry off his uncomfortable sensations by an extra amount of swagger and bluster. When the high two-wheeled dog-cart, in which the

three young men were going to drive back, came to the door, Beau Pierce-Dawnay said, with a significant glance, to Philip—

“You’d better drive, old man. You’re the steadiest of the lot, and that horse is a nasty vicious brute, and stumbles into the bargain.”

But Matthew chose to regard this as an unwarrantable act of interference. He was in the humour to pick a quarrel with any one, and the other man’s imperturbable good-temper had been a source of irritation to him all the evening. With some insolence, he said he had hired the trap himself; he knew very well what he was about; he had driven out, and he was going to drive back again. If Mr. Pierce-Dawnay was afflicted with nervousness he could walk, as far as he, Matt, was concerned, and welcome.

Beau, however, was far from quarrelsome; he got up behind the dog-cart with a good-natured laugh.

“Oh! I don’t care a rap,” he said. “I can stick on here tight enough. If the horse comes down, you and Philip ’ll get the broken necks, you know, not I.”

This speech did not tend to soothe Matthew Enderby. The horse justified the evil opinion given of it, and the young man, half from recklessness, half from temper, drove wildly, and frightened and fretted the ill-conditioned animal into a perfect fever. At last, at the top of a long, steep hill, Matt lost all patience, and flung the reins petulantly to his brother.

“There, catch hold,” he cried. “I shall get mad and cut the brute to pieces in a minute. I want to light my pipe. Hold him up, you fool! what are you at, letting him gander about the road in that fashion?”

Philip caught hold of the reins as best he could; but the slap of them on the horse's back, as Matt threw them to him, had thoroughly scared it. The horse bolted. Philip was almost helpless; he was sitting low, and driving from the wrong side too; he could not get any purchase on the horse's mouth. Matt, perceiving the danger, made a clutch at the reins again, with an oath, and succeeded in giving a violent wrench to the right hand one. The horse swerved,

crossed its fore legs, and came down like a lump of lead on the hard frosty road.

The next thing Philip remembered was standing out in the roadway, with Pierce-Dawnay by him. He was not much hurt himself, but an indefinable dread was upon him. He went over to the further side of the broken-down carriage. There was a great heap of stones on the grass by the roadway,—and across the heap, just where the light of the lamp fell, lay poor young Matthew Enderby. He would never swagger, or play cards, or get into debt again, in this world.

Some grief is unapproachable; it resists sympathy almost as an insult, and nurses itself in black silence and gloom. So it was with the Squire. He did not say much about his son's death, but he brooded over it in heavy speechless wretchedness. He could not accustom his mind to it; he had a sense of unpardonable injury and wrong. The house at Bassett became a sad place. Jack was up at college, and he went home as little as possible, though the fact of his being blessed by nature with many

characteristics of the true Enderby type made his presence rather welcome than otherwise to his father. Towards Philip the Squire felt with deep unreasoning bitterness. The thought that this boy, for whom he had never cared greatly, who did not resemble the rest of the family either in looks or in temperament, would take his dashing elder brother's place, was hateful to him. Heretofore Philip had been simply uninteresting to his father; he was uninteresting no longer, he was obnoxious. If one of the two lads must go, why had not Fate selected him? The Squire could have spared him well enough, if it came to that.

Meanwhile, Philip himself was half broken-hearted. Death, in kindly fashion, rubs out the remembrance of past faults and follies, and leaves generally a fair and gracious picture of those we have loved. Their virtues seem altogether their own, and their vices no vital or integral part of them, but merely an unsightly smirch easily washed away and obliterated. Ever since the days when Matt's tin soldiers invariably won glorious victories on the floor of the Bassett

Darcy nursery, over his own unsuccessful squadrons, lying prone and scattered on the ground, Philip had always admired his handsome, headstrong elder brother, and yielded him the first place willingly, even gladly. It was horrible that Matt, who was so brilliant and taking, who promised to support the family name in such an open-handed manner, who enjoyed life so vastly, should have been snatched away thus at a moment's notice.

But people were kind to Philip in his distress. Mrs. Murray, notably, was far kinder than she had ever been before. Her affection seemed to rise with extraordinary rapidity from zero to boiling-point. She welcomed him to her house, and quite advertized the fact of her daughter's engagement. Perhaps our friend Philip was pitiably inexperienced in those days. He accepted Mrs. Murray's attentions with the warmest gratitude, while it never occurred to him to inquire as to the root from which they might spring.

Mrs. Murray's affection, however, was tempered with astuteness. As time passed by, she began again to cast a doubtful eye

on the young man's pretensions. He was in all probability secure of a good position and large fortune now; but then, his father—as far as Mrs. Murray could make out—was the sort of man who might live for ever. Meanwhile, Cecilia had other admirers. The good lady weighed the bird in the hand against the birds in the bush; and, unless the former should develop sudden and unexpected plumpness, felt it would be advisable to relinquish her hold on it, and employ both hands in trying to catch one of those other birds that were still at liberty. She announced one day, to the young man's surprise, that she had really given him time enough; it looked bad for a girl to be hanging on with a long uncertain engagement like this; Mr. Enderby must shilly-shally no longer; Cecilia, poor dear child, was growing wretchedly worn and peaky; Mr. Enderby must marry her at once, on a good income—"such an income as will be in keeping with your position and prospects, you know"—or not at all.

Philip was a good deal startled, both by the announcement itself, and the tone in

which it was conceived. There was one clause in it, notably, that offended both his taste and good feeling. Still he was very much in love. He wrote home to his mother to say he was coming, and then went down to Bassett resolved to renew his request to his father.

As long as he lived he remembered the events of that evening with painful distinctness. The dinner was not a cheerful one. The Squire was moody, and hardly spoke, except to give an order to the servants. Mrs. Enderby, with gentle tact and self-sacrificing sweetness, tried to ignore her husband's surly pre-occupation and to talk as usual; but she was nervous, and the conversation sank away again into anxious silence. Philip found his father's manner anything but reassuring; as the saying is, his heart was in his mouth.

When Mrs. Enderby had left the dining-room, Philip told his little story—told it in a modest, quiet, manly way. There was a trace of pathos in the young man's bearing as he pleaded his cause, which some hearers would have found affecting. But

Mr. Enderby was not easily affected. He turned his chair sideways, leaned his elbow on the table, and answered Philip over his shoulder, without taking the trouble to look at him.

"I told you my opinion of this foolish business of yours two years ago," he said; "it hasn't changed."

"You told us to wait, sir, and we have waited," answered Philip.

Mr. Enderby put his hand on the decanter standing by him, and refilled his glass.

"And the girl's got tired of waiting, I suppose—thinks you can ask for whatever you like now and get it; and you think the same, no doubt. You're in a pretty hurry, I dare say, to step into your dead brother's shoes."

"You've no right to say that, sir," flashed out Philip, hotly. "I've given you no cause for such a supposition. Such a thought never entered my head, or hers either. She was good enough to care for me long ago, when certainly nobody could accuse her affection of being mercenary."

"I'm glad to hear it," returned the elder man slowly. "It's as well you should know just where you stand. If you thought your brother's death would improve your prospects, you were mistaken, that's all. It won't make a penny's difference to you, while I live."

Mr. Enderby swallowed down his glass of port, and then broke out suddenly and violently—

"But for you, Matt might have been alive now. You were drunk!"

Philip set his teeth hard. He went as white as the table-cloth before him.

"I don't drink, sir," he said, "and you know it. I was as sober as I am at this moment. Pierce-Dawnay was with us; he told you so at the time."

"Pierce-Dawnay was your friend, not Matt's. What proof have I that he didn't try to make the best of a bad job, and say what he could to shield you?"

"He's my friend, as you say; but he is a gentleman all the same, sir. He is not in the habit of telling lies."

How far sullen brooding grief had really

perverted Matthew Enderby's reason, and made him harbour ugly suspicions against his son; how far he was merely actuated by a bullying desire to pain and humiliate the young man, it would be difficult to determine. Probably the two causes were too subtly mixed to be capable of separation. He sunk his head on his breast, and spoke with brutal deliberation.

"So much the worse for you, then, if you were sober. That doesn't put your conduct in a better light, as far as I can see. You can drive well enough when it pays you to drive well."

Philip sprang up from his place and came round in front of his father. His expression was full of uncontrollable amazement and horror.

"What on earth do you mean, sir?" he cried. "What are you daring to hint at? Do you know what a dastardly thing your words seem to imply?"

Mr. Enderby looked up at him without raising his head. His dull eyes were blood-shot and his face flushed with passion as he answered:—

“By God! I tell you some people would say you knew very well what you were about when you pitched Matt out on to that cursed heap of stones. This is a fine property, and you were my second son. Foul play has been heard of for a lighter stake than that before now.”

Some ten minutes later Philip rushed out into the hall, letting the door slam heavily behind him. As he did so, Mrs. Enderby moved forward in the firelight to meet him. She had been too anxious to rest by herself during this critical interview between her son and husband. She came back into the hall again, and stood near the wide open fireplace, listening with deepening fear and sorrow to the fierce voices in the dining-room.

Philip's tempest of anger died down as he caught sight of his mother. He put his arms round the frail, delicate woman in a sudden agony of tenderness.

“Come away to your room, mother,” he said huskily; “I have got to say good-bye to you.”

Poor Mrs. Enderby clung to him trembling.

“Oh, you have quarrelled!” she cried. “My dearest, if you love me, go back and make it up. Remember, your father is very quick-tempered; he often says things he regrets later, when he has recovered himself. And he is very sore about dear Matt; you know how he loved him. He cannot submit to this trial; it makes him hasty and bitter. All his hopes were centred in Matt. And then, too, he has been troubled about business. He has been tried, Philip, cruelly tried and harassed. Remember all this, dear. Go and make it up with him, for my sake. If he has been a little hard with you, try to bear it—don’t be stubborn, Philip; try to meet him half-way.”

The young man did not answer till they had crossed the hall and entered Mrs. Enderby’s little sitting-room. She stood by him, still clasping his hand, and looking with sweet piteous earnestness in his face.

“No, mother,” he said; “the apology must come from him, not from me. It can’t be made up unless he withdraws

certain accusations he has made against me."

"Then it will never be made up," said Mrs. Enderby, in a low voice.

"He has accused me of a hideous action," Philip went on, "of something preposterous, vile, unnatural. I cannot tell you about it. I had better never have been born than have dreamed of it even for an instant."

Philip flung himself down on his knees before her, and held her about the waist, pressing his face against her gown.

"Mother, promise me that you, at least, will never doubt me; that you'll never listen to any suggestions he throws out about me; that you will keep me in your heart of hearts; that you'll never let anything cloud your love for me. Promise me, mother, to believe in me always, before I go."

In the poor boy's weakness Mrs. Enderby found an unexpected calm and strength.

"Stand up, Philip," she said gently. She laid her hands on his shoulders, and looked deep into his blue eyes. "I believe in you completely and truly, Philip."

Nothing can shake my faith in you. This is a terrible delusion that has taken possession of your father's mind, the fruit of sorrow. You must not hold him accountable for it. Thoughts take hold of us sometimes which it is as impossible to drive away as it is to rid ourselves of disease itself. But they pass after a time, and we shake off the remembrance of them as we shake off the remembrance of a wretched dream, with infinite thankfulness and relief. Please God, it may be so in this case, and that before very long you may come back to me again. Ah! you are very dear to me, Philip. You have been the stay and comfort of my life; you have been son and daughter to me, both in one."

Mrs. Enderby could not manage to say more. The two stood looking at each other for a few minutes in silence. Then Philip bent down and kissed his mother, and went away.

The proverb says troubles rarely come singly. To Philip Enderby they seemed to come in legions just at this time. Mrs. Murray was pitiless; as the income was

not forthcoming on the one part, the bride was not forthcoming on the other. She developed an admirable sense of duty—feared that the young man must have behaved shamefully to his father to cause this rupture and denial. A bad son is calculated to make but a sorry husband. Cecilia's happiness must not be endangered. Mrs. Murray felt it would be both immoral and impolitic to put a premium on filial disobedience. On the highest grounds she therefore entirely refused to think of Mr. Enderby as a possible son-in-law.

So there was an end to Philip's budding romance. At one stroke he found himself bereft alike of parents, home, and mistress, and thrown upon the world as a mere soldier of fortune. With his faithful and affectionate nature, he was bound to suffer very deeply under this accumulation of misfortunes. I do not wish to draw a fancy portrait of the young man, and hold him up as a model of fortitude and virtue. On the contrary, I must admit that for a time after the final breaking off of his engagement, it seemed a little doubtful whether Philip

was not determined to set out on that unprofitable journey, commonly known as "going to the bad." He was so miserable, poor fellow, that he was sorely tempted to drown misery in debauch. But, perhaps his mother's prayers, perhaps a certain innate purity and sweetness, which at bottom made riot disgusting to him, called Philip back before he had sunk very deep in the slough. He recovered his footing on the solid ground of good living, and, not without a hot sense of shame and self-reproach in face of his past aberrations, took, once and for all, to wiser courses.

Great public events, too, came at this crisis indirectly to his aid. The year 1854 saw the beginning of a war which we are now assured was highly discreditable, if not actually iniquitous. Be that as it may, the fact remains—happily or unhappily, I know not which—that men may fight as gallantly in a bad cause as a good one, and that the moral effect on individuals may be as salutary when they suffer, struggle, and endure in an unjust quarrel as in a just one. Philip Enderby began to show what spirit

he was truly of. He emerged, he distinguished himself. Later, during the hideous months of the Indian Mutiny, his name obtained a rather enviable notoriety. The plain slender young fellow, whose quiet ways had made him something of a butt for the wits of his regiment, developed both mentally and physically. India, for some years after the rebellion, offered brilliant opportunities to soldiers who had the wit to take advantage of them; and Philip's patience, constancy, and courage had already marked him out as a person to be entrusted with delicate or hazardous work. As the young man could not marry his love, he decided to marry his sword, and contrived, as time went on, to carve out for himself a sufficiently distinct place in the world with that somewhat uncultivated instrument.

A certain simplicity and directness of purpose never left him. But as he grew older, Philip Enderby was not a person with whom it was advisable to take a liberty. It came to be understood that some matters must not be spoken of lightly

before him—a woman's reputation must not be smiled away, or a man's moral delinquencies too easily condoned. Younger men were disposed to think him a trifle too rigid in matters of virtue and religion for the entire comfort of his neighbours—a person given to slight exaggerations, stern, and not altogether easy to get on with. Yet every one admitted that he was kindly too, a faithful friend, and a fine officer. At eight-and-forty the Colonel's position was acknowledged and assured. He had escaped many dangers, resisted many temptations; and as yet, perhaps fortunately for himself, he had been very true to the memory of his first love.

And Mrs. Enderby? Loving both husband and son, nothing was left her but to live by faith. But faith, unassisted by recurrent and encouraging revelations, is a lean and far from nourishing diet. Mrs. Enderby did not thrive upon it. As day after day and month after month passed by, without any change or sign of relenting on the part of the Squire towards Philip, faith began to grow weak, and Mrs. Enderby

began to grow weak also. She hungered after her boy. He had been a good and gentle son to her ever since the time when, clad in a round holland pinafore and white tucked drawers, he had trotted after her up and down the long passages at Bassett Darcy, and about the sheltered, high-walled gardens, fragrant with the scent of pinks and mignonette. Later, he had never failed to scrawl her a weekly letter from school, containing an ill-spelled chronicle of rudimentary joys and sorrows. And afterwards, when he went into the army—while through many wakeful nights, in the great blue bedroom over the hall, she had wrestled in prayer for him, and agonized over those, to her, mysterious temptations that are supposed specially to beset young gentlemen of the upper classes—she had always found him come home to her, as quiet and simple and tenderly thoughtful as ever.

Only once did she venture to break the silence which her husband maintained upon the subject of his quarrel with his son; and then the Squire's fierce, unreasoning violence terrified her into patient submission again.

Mrs. Enderby could cling to her love, but she could not fight for it. As time went on, she fell into a strange habit of sitting silent and unemployed in the large, dusky saloon, overlooking the broad, smooth lawn and lazy river. She would not go out much ; she shrank from meeting her neighbours, or even from stepping in and out of the cottages, with a basket of dainties on her arm, which she distributed along with the most sulphureous of tracts, and the very mildest of personal advice. Sometimes she seemed to be bewildered, and hardly to know what she was doing. Unpleasant rumours got about concerning her ; people said poor Mrs. Enderby's mind was going.

Medical science, in the neat and drily attentive person of Dr. Rideout of Slowby—it was before the day of Dr. Symes and the local pre-eminence of Tullingworth—owned itself baffled. There was no organic disease discoverable, and yet the poor lady was evidently sinking.

The feeble flame of Mrs. Enderby's life flickered up fitfully whenever her husband entered the room. Hope lingers with us,

and old habits assert themselves even when the sands have run very low, and the feet of the mourners are near the door. She told him that there was "nothing really the matter. She was only very weak, and would be better again in a day or so."

But the day on which Mrs. Enderby would be better never dawned. That flickering flame sank slowly down till it was quenched in darkness, and Mrs. Enderby lay dead. She had paid the penalty of too great faith and love. Virtues should be of a strictly limited order, one sometimes fears, if they are to bring their possessors in a comfortable dividend on this side the grave.

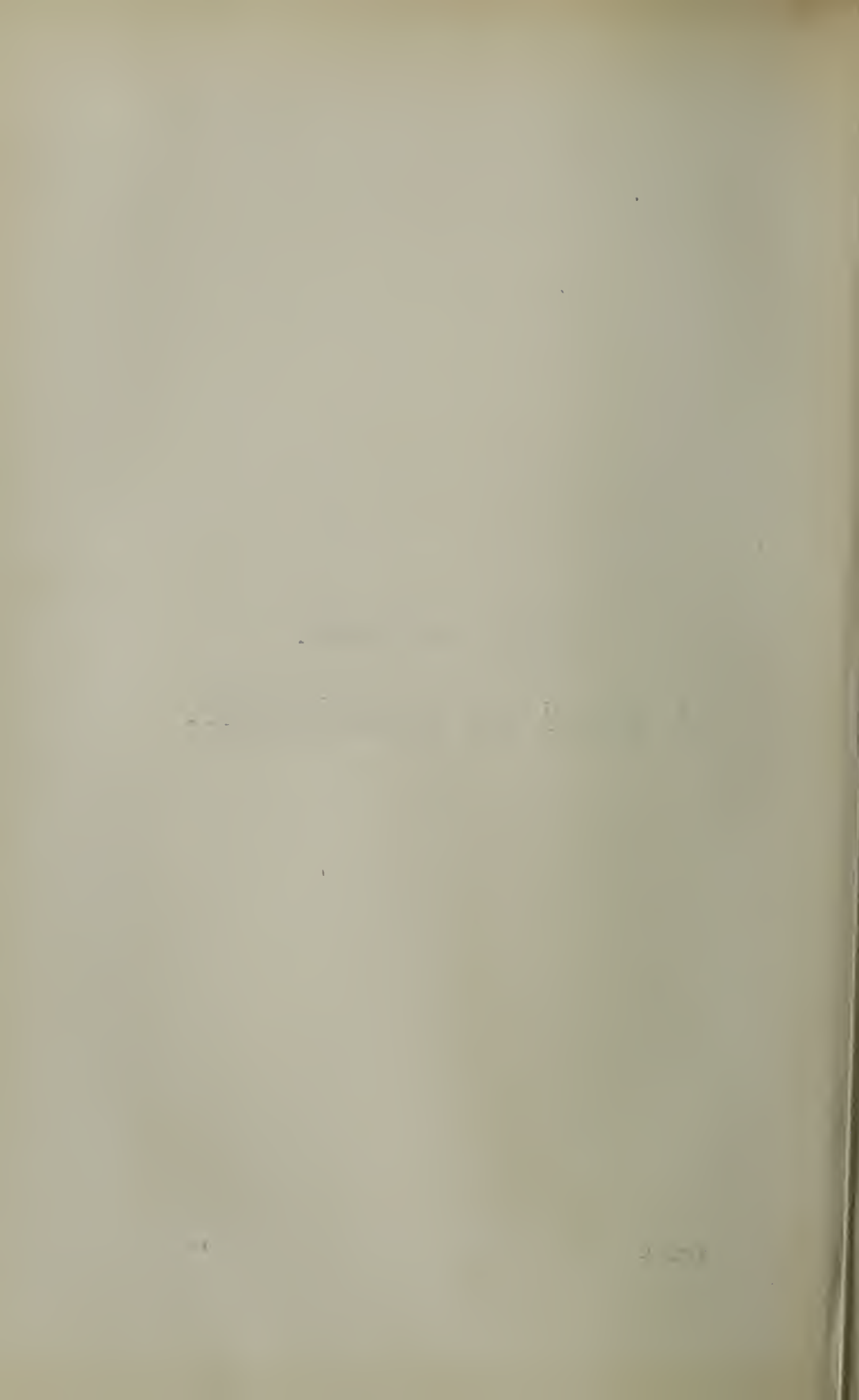
Matthew Enderby missed his wife very keenly. He had loved her truly, according to his lights. The custom of many years had made her presence necessary to him, and her death seemed somewhat of an impertinence. It was the only independent action she had taken, save a certain tremulous support given to Philip's love affair, since he married her. Mr. Enderby could hardly understand it. He was sad, lonely, angry; and his anger, not perhaps un-

naturally, vented itself in implacable hostility towards the son, whose action, he persuaded himself, was, if indirectly, still certainly connected with his wife's long illness and death.



BOOK SECOND.

A TEST OF FRIENDSHIP.



CHAPTER I.

THE THREADS BEGIN TO CROSS.

COMPARED with many of its sister towns situated along the shores of the Gulf of Genoa, Terzia cannot claim to be a very pretty place. It is too full of the whir of machinery, the clank and clang of hammers, and the dust of workshops to be altogether pleasant. The beautiful old ship-building trade, formerly the wealth of this part of the coast, is fast dying out; but a few half-finished wooden vessels, with an olive branch at the prow, stand on the stocks in the large half-deserted yards on the grey sea-shore. Iron and steam, strong and unpoetic, have it pretty much all their own way nowadays. The famous Corniche Road, too, is here narrowed to a sort of straggling street between high vineyard walls and tall

painted houses; and—whether it appears as a sea of pale mud, or is smothered in paler and at least equally objectionable dust—is always, wet or dry, a perfect pandemonium of rough two-wheeled wag-gons, loaded with heavy cotton bales, sacks of rags, or with great barrels piled up to an alarming height, and of straining mules and horses, and yelling drivers, and grating tramcars.

Yet if you leave the busy little town, with its teeming streets, and wander up the steep paved lanes behind between the vineyards, and if, when you have passed the last of the red and yellow walls, and step out into the open olive grounds above, you stop and turn, and look back, the scene is very moving and inspiring even here. For you are in Italy, after all—beautiful, passionate, terrible Italy.

About a quarter of a mile out of Terzia, going eastward towards Genoa, you come to some rusty iron gates in the high, red-plastered wall that skirts the road on the left. A broad carriage-way leads from these gates first across flat market-gardens,

in which the peasants work, with sleeves and trousers stripped up, showing bare, muscular brown arms and legs; then, turning sharply to the left, it runs at the foot of a natural cliff of buff-coloured rock, supported here and there by masonry. After thirty yards or so the road turns to the right and climbs the hill, shaded on the south by a line of dwarfed and distorted fir trees, and with broad spaces of grass on each side of it, bright in the spring-time with flame-coloured gladiolas, red orchis, and blue-feather hyacinth. Another zigzag, through vineyard terraces and broken rocks, among which the fig trees root themselves, and straggle a maze of smooth grey branches, grey roots and glossy dark-green leaves, and then at last you reach the final bit of the ascent—a broad carriage-way still, gravelled with little black and white pebbles from the neighbouring beach, a wall of brick and rock on the left hand, and on the right a drop into the vineyard below. On either hand the road is bordered with hedges of pink monthly roses, wherein the cicalas, with their great eyes and foolish faces, sit

fiddling all day long in the hot sunshine. The carriage-drive ends at last in a wide gravelled terrace in front of a small orange-red stuccoed villa.

Standing on this high terrace, where the noises of the road, the railway, and the town—the ring of hammers, crack of whips, and wild cry of the muleteers—reach you, softened and harmonized by distance, the scene is a very noble one.

In the south the purple sea rises and meets the sky-line. The grey sweep of the narrow beach trends away in a bold curve, here bordered by gleaming houses, and there broken by some dark densely wooded promontory, past cape after cape, and headland after headland to the westward. Just below lies the town, built in massive blocks of tall many-windowed houses, which have flat or low-pitched roofs, and are painted every conceivable colour, from the lightest green or yellow to the deepest blue or chocolate. At the back of the town, and rising tier above tier up the sloping foothills, are vineyards and gardens, with now and again some gaily coloured villa, or the

tall campanile of a village church. Here and there long lines of cypresses follow each other in a dark and mystic procession down the hillside, marking the boundary of a landowner's property. Above, the olive-grounds stretch in a misty silver belt around the slopes. Above them are thickets of great white heath, and sweet bay and myrtle, with the quaint, blotted form of an umbrella pine, disengaging itself sharply in places from the undergrowth. Above, again, are dusky fir-woods, and then at last your eyes rest on the bare arid mountain sides towering up in the searching sunlight, the summits crowned by a pilgrimage church or monastery, or rising naked, unadorned, and harsh against the sky.

The Apennines behind Terzia may be described as a giant hand pointing seaward, with deep ravines and watercourses between the gigantic outstretched fingers. Only the town and beach and road are pale; all the rest—woods, mountains, rich purple sea, and rich purple sky—glow and palpitate with intensity of colour; while in the extreme west, above the deep blue of

far-off hills and capes, soaring up into the clear ether, rise the glittering peaks and dazzling snow-wastes of the Maritime Alps.

Towards the latter end of April, 1877, about six months after old Matthew Enderby's death, one burning afternoon, the subject for a delightful little picture might have been found on the terrace up at the Villa Mortelli.

A low broad parapet of stone, stuccoed and painted the same orange-red as the house, guards the terrace in front. Looking down over it there is a sheer drop of some five-and-twenty, or perhaps thirty feet, into the vineyard below. At this time the leaves were just breaking, and a delicate veil of green spread itself over the face of the vineyards.

In the corner of the terrace, away from the carriage-drive, with her back against a trellised and somewhat dilapidated arbour, smothered in Wistaria and climbing roses, sat a young girl. She rested one elbow on the low wall by her side, and held in the other hand a great red umbrella;—not one

of those mean little scarlet parasols that ladies affected so much some few years ago, but a real, honest, peasant's umbrella, big enough to shelter a whole family from sun or rain, and decorated round the edge of it with a barbaric pattern, woven in staring black and white and yellow.

The young lady was very simply dressed in a plain light cotton gown, which had, however, an admirable air of freshness and crispness in every fold and frill of it. Her figure was slight but delicately rounded, and her face was charming; not strictly beautiful, perhaps, for there were delightful little touches of individuality about it which prevented its belonging to any stereotyped and obvious order of female loveliness. It was just that—an entirely charming face, bright, out-looking, and with a sort of morning clearness upon it, and an effect of guilelessness which made one disposed to treat this young lady more as an attractive child than as a person who had already reached the tiresome period of life technically described as—years of discretion.

Her hair—fair, with golden lights and

ruddy shadows in it—was gathered up high at the back, showing the shape of her head, and curled prettily upon her forehead. Her complexion was fair, too, with a clear healthy tinge of red in her cheeks; the nose, a little uncertain in line, but daintily cut about the tip and small curved nostrils; the mouth round and sweet, though wanting in those generous curves about the lips which make some mouths so nobly beautiful. Her eyes, a clear blue-grey, were set perhaps just a trifle too near together; still, they were finely shaped, and opened well. There was nothing too positive, too definite in the girl's face. Her long eyelashes and arched eyebrows were but a few shades darker than her bright hair.

Altogether she was charming; and charming, too, with that peculiar indescribable charm that belongs to certain women—a magnetic quality not dependent on faultlessness of physical beauty for its existence, but a something beguiling and upsetting, especially to the masculine sense, which seems to emanate from the whole person.

Certain women have a singular power of establishing a relation—I do not know how else to put it—with almost every man they come across. How it is done I cannot pretend to say; for one may be very sensible of an effect, and remain entirely unable to analyze the cause of it. Only I fancy that every woman whose name has come down to us through the long centuries with a glamour of magic about it, so that the very sound of it makes the blood pulse more quickly, must, in some degree, have possessed that strange power. Helen must have had it, or Troy town would never have suffered long sorrow and fire and final desolation. All those gracious and noble ladies must have had it whose remembrance is enshrined for ever in the "*Ballade des Dames du temps jadis*," of François Villon, thief, profligate, and writer of imperishable verse. Catherine of Siena must have had it, or never, surely, would popes and priests and princes have listened so humbly to her chiding. Julie d'Étange—most moving, if most imprudent of fictitious heroines—must have had it, or M. de Wolmar would never

have married her, any more than Saint-Preux would have broken his heart for her among the rocks above the blue lake at Meillerie. These, and many more: for the list would be a long one of potent and perilous names. Yes, we had better forget them, we sensible middle-aged people, and let them fade away into the great unknown along with "the snows of yester year."

In saying all this I do not, for a moment, desire to imply that there was anything very wonderful, extraordinary, or epoch-making about the girl sitting in the Italian sunshine, on the terrace up at the little red villa; nor do I, for a moment, purpose to compare her with those queens of fiction, life, and legend whose memory comes over us with so dangerous a strength.

The indefinable charm I have spoken of greets you in many and very different places. It belongs exclusively to no one age, or class, or nation; it may be found both in saint and sinner. It may look out at you alike from the face of a labourer's daughter, bending over a steaming and prosaic wash-tub, and from that of a child in the perky,

progressive class-room of a modern board-school, and from that of some well-bred and well-known woman moving in the sacred, innermost circle of London or Parisian society. Still it is not very common—perhaps fortunately—all the same. The plain, steady, common-sense work of the world would hardly keep on quite so regularly if it was very common. And it is only fair to add, too, that hundreds and thousands of women have been honoured highly and loved devotedly who possessed no trace of it. It is a peculiar gift to chosen individuals; it comes to them by nature, and was never learnt, nor taught of any yet. Only, wherever you meet with it, the colour grows richer and the pace faster, and Love laughs aloud with the hope of another victim; and life either spreads out before you strangely fair, and deep, and full, or is stained for ever after with the memory of a great regret.

On the low red wall, just beyond the shadow cast by the big umbrella, sitting hunched together basking in the sunshine, was a good-sized brown monkey; a grotesque

and sorrowful little figure, curiously in contrast with that of the young girl.

Centuries of disappointment and fruitless endeavour seemed to have wrinkled the loose skin on his forehead. Occasionally he reached round and scratched his back with one thin, brown hand, or made a fierce, rapid grab at the small green lizards that ran glittering up and along the sunny wall. If the girl moved, ever so slightly, he looked round sharply at her, with that quick uplifting of the eyebrows and gleam of the sad shrewd eyes, which go to make a monkey's face so unspeakably restless and painful.

The cicadas shrilled in the rose-bushes, while the green frogs, at the old tank away along the vineyard path to the left, kept up the chorus immortalized by Aristophanes. The jangle of bells came down from one of the village churches on the hillside above, and the grate of wheels and cry of the muleteers came up from the crowded road below. Little playful winds swept across from the deep mountain valleys, scattered a few loose petals of the roses on the trellised arbour, and then wandered away out to sea. And

the charming girl sat dreaming, looking lazily out over the brilliant scene from under the rosy shade of her red umbrella, while the brown monkey beside her basked in the broad sunshine, musing, perhaps, in perplexity of spirit, on the many griefs and wrongs of his strange half-human race.

There seemed a pause, a space of sweet sunny waiting, up at the Villa Mortelli that afternoon. The lights were lit, and the curtain was up, and the stage was set and ready. When would the rest of the actors come on?

About five o'clock the young lady's lazy reverie was brought to a close by the rattling of a carriage up the steep road between the rose-hedges, and the grinding of the loose gravel under its wheels as it drew up at the front door.

She had watched the carriage ever since it turned in at the iron gates off the high road—had stretched herself a little, and sat up with a growing expression of interest and vivacity in her pretty face.

"Malvolio," she said, leaning towards the

monkey as she spoke, "I perceive that there has been a slight mistake. Your poor master is grilling himself quite needlessly at Terzia railway station all this while. His temper will be execrable when he returns. He will not be able to forgive himself for having been coerced into committing a civility. Prepare yourself, my dearest little beast;" she added, "there will shortly be remarkable developments in the situation."

The monkey gazed at her anxiously, as though trying hard to understand. He scratched his ugly little head, wrinkled up his forehead, and grinned rather wickedly. The girl watched him attentively for a moment or two, and then laughed gaily and softly, as a child does with a delicious anticipation of coming amusement.

"Anything is delightful in the way of a change, isn't it, my excellent Malvolio?" she said to the monkey.

Colonel Enderby was a long-suffering man. As a rule he could put up resignedly with a large amount of discomfort. But he had come to visit Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay,

at the Villa Mortelli, out of the purest sense of duty. She was the widow of an old friend, and the Colonel had a high respect for the claims of friendship, even in the second degree. Still, it must be allowed that where duty is the sole motive power, small annoyances are liable to take a very strong hold upon the imagination; and as he got out of the carriage, Colonel Enderby certainly felt far from urbane. He was choked with dust and roasted with the blazing afternoon sun. He had left his travelling companion seated over the remnants of an excellent luncheon in the shaded hall of a Genoese *café*. The thought of Edmund Drake smoking peacefully in that cool and stately place had been distinctly irritating. He could have found it in his heart to use some rather forcible expressions concerning these few miles of road out from Genoa. He was prepared to state on oath, if necessary, that they were simply the most hot, arid, ugly, and generally insufferable miles of road in the known world.

The untidy plausible Italian coachman

rang the bell, and then banged casually on the door with the handle of his whip, to hurry the servants within; but no sound was audible indoors. Bells, apparently, were answered with truly artistic deliberation at the little red villa.

Colonel Enderby stamped his feet to settle his trousers down over his boots, and beat himself a little with his gloves to get some of the pale dust off his coat, looking rather gloomy and injured all the while. It was extremely unpleasant to him to be otherwise than absolutely neat and clean. He glanced critically at the pair of small, weedy carriage horses, who stood with heads hanging wearily down and streaming flanks. Then he turned impatiently to the door again.

"Nuisance it is, waiting!" he said. "I suppose this is the right house? Why on earth don't they answer the bell?"

Looking up as he spoke, he became aware, for the first time, of the presence of the young lady, who stood watching him from the other side of the terrace. He was conscious of a slight shock of surprise, and of

a sincere hope that she might not have overheard his hasty observation. He lifted his hat, and keeping it in his hand, passed round in front of the horses' heads and walked across the terrace towards her.

The girl, too, came a few steps forward. Her light cotton gown showed a rosy red in the shade of her big umbrella. Her eyes were very bright, and she was smiling. It was a smile not easily forgotten—brilliant, irresistible, delicious to look at, and liable to retain a prominent place subsequently in the mental vision.

As she came forward the monkey scrambled down off the wall and followed her, seizing the folds of her dress with his long narrow hands for support. He chattered angrily at the carriage and the approaching stranger—his queer wizened countenance distorted with emotion. Meanwhile the good-looking Italian driver, leaning lazily against the nearest of his smoking horses, laughed and made grimaces at the poor little creature, exciting him to a painful pitch of impotent fury.

“Colonel Enderby,” said the girl, looking

up at him, and still smiling, "I am afraid you have altogether forgotten me. I am so sorry. Indeed, it amounts to being a little humiliating for me, for I have the most perfect recollection of you. You were always so kind to me."

Philip Enderby felt slightly embarrassed. He was not accustomed to be greeted after this fashion by unusually pretty young ladies. Since the far-off days of Cecilia Murray, his experience in the matter of women's society had neither been very large nor very intimate. He had an almost quixotic reverence for the sex—such a reverence as cynical persons are wont to say can only be maintained at the expense of the presence of accurate knowledge.

There was a frankness in the young lady's expression, and a graceful self-possession in her manner, however, which the Colonel found reassuring. He answered her slowly, perhaps a trifle stiffly; yet he could not help smiling too, her face in its expression had such a bewitching fearlessness.

"I ought to know you, though nine years have made a good deal of difference, it

must be owned. You are Miss Pierce-Dawnay."

The girl laughed softly, and put up her eyebrows with a little air of protestation and regret.

"Oh yes," she said; "nine years make a lamentable difference, of course. They change simple Jessie into elaborate Miss Pierce-Dawnay, and they put dolls and bonbons out of the question. That last is especially trying for me. I am just as fond of bonbons as ever. Your taste in dolls was not—well, how shall I say it?—exactly professional, Colonel Enderby, but in bonbons I found it ravishing."

There was a carefulness and distinctness in Miss Pierce-Dawnay's pronunciation which one frequently remarks in English persons who are constantly in the habit of speaking a foreign language. Her words did not run into each other in the slipshod fashion too common even among our well-bred and highly educated countrywomen. They seemed to stand apart, and each maintain a full and separate value. This little mannerism has something both pretty and arresting to the attention in it.

Philip, quiet, serious, middle-aged man as he was, felt delicately amused and interested in the charming young creature before him. It is very strangely pleasant, as one gets on in years and the glory of the day grows pale, to meet with something as fresh and gay and fearless as this girl. To the Colonel there was a touch of pathos in her radiant youthfulness. She struck him as a charming child even now, and he answered her little speech with a certain smiling gravity.

"We might manage the bonbons still, I dare say, if you wish it."

"Oh," she cried, "thank you! I have yet, then, something to live for, and you are doubly welcome. To tell the truth, we have been slightly wanting in amiability and animation lately here at the Villa Mortelli. Your arrival is every way agreeable; we have wanted something to change the current of our thoughts."

Colonel Enderby bowed his recognition of this civil observation.

"But mamma will be impatient to see you," the young lady continued. "And,

meanwhile, will you kindly discharge that intolerable driver, who is nearly sending our poor Malvolio into fits by jeering at him? Then we will come indoors, please. Ah! there is Parker. She will tell you what to pay that wretched driver. They always overcharge; it is their recognized system. Parker is the only member of this establishment who can manage them."

The person indicated, a tall, angular, hard-featured woman, stood in the doorway, delivering herself of a series of short observations in curiously bad Italian.

"Antonio is to take Colonel Enderby's things down to his hotel later, Miss Jessie," she said, looking sharply at Philip, and addressing his companion. "Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay is waiting for you in the drawing-room. Marie's taken in tea."

The Colonel, assisted, whether he would or no, by Parker—who indulged in biting comments on the shiftiness of Italians in general, and Genoese cab-drivers in particular—finally succeeded in satisfying the demands of the coachman. Then the long whip cracked, and the tired little horses

jerked up their heads, and the carriage rattled away down the steep road between the pink rose-hedges in the southern sunshine.

"Shall we come indoors now?" asked Jessie.

She closed her umbrella, and, picking up Malvolio in her arms, turned towards the house. As she did so, Colonel Enderby was sensible of a quick movement of repulsion, almost of disgust.

"Surely you are not going to carry that monkey," he said hastily. "Here, let me take it."

"Oh no, he would perhaps bite you," she replied; "and that would be such an unfortunate beginning to your visit. He is very spiteful with strangers. But I often carry him when his master, my cousin, Bertie Ames, is not at hand—don't I Malvolio?"

Colonel Enderby could offer no further objection, yet somehow he did not at all like it. Perhaps it was the result of a long night journey through from Paris; perhaps he had got sunstroke standing talking on

the terrace without his hat ; but he was undoubtedly aware of a strange and decidedly disagreeable sensation as he passed from the glow and splendour of colour and sunshine outside into the dim chill entrance-hall of the Villa Mortelli. It seemed to him as if somewhere else, long, long ago, all this had happened before. He knew it was a foolish, absurd fancy, and it annoyed him. Yet surely it was not the first time he had followed the graceful flitting figure of this young girl up the cold, white, marble staircase, while the weird face of the still chattering and but half-pacified monkey grinned back at him over her shoulder.

CHAPTER II.

BEAUMONT PIERCE-DAWNAY'S WIDOW.

THE Villa Mortelli is a plain house. It has seen its best days, and everything about it has grown a little tumble-down and antiquated. The present owner is only too happy to let the upper suites of rooms to any family, Italian or foreign, with a taste for quiet and economy, which can be induced to rent them; while the surroundings of the house are left pretty much to their own devices, subject to a periodic tidying up on the part of the peasant overseer, who looks after the vineyards and market-gardens below.

It is a decidedly plain house. The ground-floor on either side the front door has but a couple of heavily grated windows in it, and is given over to kitchens and chilly flagged

store-rooms opening into a central hall. Above is a low *entresol*, with ugly little square windows overlooking the terrace; and above, again, are two floors of large and rather handsome rooms. The lower of these two suites opens at the western end on to the flat roof of a building originally, no doubt, designed for a coach-house and covered yard. The roof is supported on an arcade of arches and massive square pillars, and covers quite a considerable area of ground. The house, with the said building or *loggia*, is painted, as has already been stated, a deep orange red. The windows have outside wooden shutters to them, originally a vivid blue in colour, but now weathered by the action of the rain and sun and sea-wind to a dull neutral tint.

Beyond the house, on the same level as the terrace, and divided from it by a dilapidated wooden paling, is a square flower-garden; a neglected wilderness of a place, a mere tangle of roses, camellias, lilacs, and other flowering shrubs, with lilies and hyacinths below them, straggling about the ill-kept beds as they please.

Some lemon trees are trained against the back wall facing the southern sun; and in the centre of the garden, where the four weedy gravel paths meet, stands a clump of not over-productive orange trees. On the low red boundary wall are large earthenware pots of fantastic shapes containing plants of tall sword-leaved aloes.

Immediately behind the house rises a cliff, up which a light iron staircase leads from the back of the *loggia* to the vineyard above. Higher is a slope of coarse grass, the rising ground being crowned with a thick little wood of scrub oak, ilex, and fir.

Jessie, with the monkey in her arms, went quickly upstairs, and, crossing the landing, threw open the tall narrow doors of the drawing-room.

"Mamma," she said, in her clear detached tones, "here is Colonel Enderby. He has driven out all the way from Genoa."

The inside of the little red villa is in harmony with the exterior. It, too, has seen its best days. The room into which the Colonel found himself ushered by his

charming guide was long and high, with a vaulted and richly painted ceiling. The two southern windows were shaded with half-closed shutters and red blinds; while the one at the far end of the apartment, draped like the others with faded yellow brocade curtains, stood wide open on to the flat roof beyond. The sun slanting in through it filled the air with warm mellow light. There was an effect of worn-out splendour about the room. The covers of the large couches and chairs showed frayed and threadbare at the points of greatest contact; the plentiful gilding of consol-tables and mirror-frames was a good deal tarnished: but the glorious sunshine streaming in enriched and harmonized it all. Even the marble floor, but sparsely covered with rugs, looked only agreeably cool in the glowing atmosphere.

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, with both hands outstretched, and a considerable rustling of full black silk and grenadine skirts, came rapidly across the room to greet her guest.

“Ah, my dear friend!” she exclaimed,

"this is indeed a pleasure. How very good it is of you to come to me."

Colonel Enderby bowed over the handsome woman's hands as he held them.

"You are too kind," he answered gallantly. "I engaged long ago always to obey your summons."

"I know—I know you promised. But it is a long time ago. It is so long, too, since we have met at all that I really scrupled to trouble you—the more so, perhaps, because you have been very helpful to me in the past. People say I am exacting; that I demand too much. Those are odious accusations, you know. They make one nervous of asking a service from even one's best friends, at times."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay put up one hand, and pushed back, rather impatiently, the folds of the black lace mantilla which was fastened across her dusky hair, and hung down softly about her shoulders.

"I have been in great perplexity," she said. "Your visit is most welcome."

She spoke rapidly, and there was a ring of sincerity, almost of enthusiasm, in her

reception of him, in which a vainer man than Philip Enderby might have found occasion for a pleasant sense of elation. Luckily, however, he was not given to ebullitions of personal vanity. He supposed the lady's pecuniary affairs were in disorder—it had happened more than once before now—and that she wanted him to set them straight for her. He possessed a very romantic reverence for womankind in the mass; but, all the same, he was satisfied to take up an extremely practical position with regard to this lady. He had no sentimental hankerings after relations of an intimate or emotional character.

And yet Eleanor Pierce-Dawnay, at two-and-thirty, with her well-set head, pure oval face, and luminous brown eyes, greeting her guest so charmingly in the pale, faded room at the Villa Mortelli, was unquestionably a woman whom you might easily have been excused for desiring to improve your acquaintance with. She was tall, with a fine, supple figure, and stately carriage. Her black hair had none of that greasy gloss on it which too often makes black hair anything

but a beauty. Her complexion was dull, it is true ; but her skin was even in tone and delicate in texture. She looked like a woman who loved an indoor life, and warm, fragrant atmosphere. There was a richness of suggestion, so to speak, and an intensity about her such as usually go with mental and social rather than with physical activity. The Colonel was aware that his hostess's course had been a slightly original and erratic one ; otherwise, listening to her fluent speech and noting her rather stormy beauty, he might very well have wondered a little why this striking-looking young woman had elected to shut herself up, with her step-daughter, in the solitude of a quiet country house.

“ You are not the least altered,” she went on, moving back a step or two, and looking at her guest carefully.

“ I wonder whether that is good news or not,” answered Philip, smiling. He was a trifle put about by this attentive scrutiny.

“ Undoubtedly it is good news.”

Eleanor laid her hand lightly on Colonel Enderby's arm.

“You have come, and I am very grateful. There is the whole matter. Now let us have some tea. You must be tired after your long journey. Come and sit down comfortably.”

“I am so disgustingly dirty,” remarked the Colonel, as he followed his hostess up the long room. He had been wishing to make this apology from the moment he came in. “I am really ashamed of appearing before you in this state.”

Eleanor stopped a moment, and turned to him.

“The same little mania as of old about dust, Colonel Enderby,” she said. “Ah! that reminds me of so much.”

During the foregoing conversation the girl had been standing aside, watching her two companions with a gay little air of interest and amusement. Now she moved away, and stepped out on to the loggia.

“Mamma is going to have reminiscences,” she murmured. “We will retire, Malvolio, and return at a more convenient season.”

“Dear child,” called Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay

after her ; “remember the sun. Have you got a hat ? ”

“The awning is up,” answered the girl, looking back and smiling brightly—less, perhaps, at her stepmother than at Philip—“and the sun never affects me. I am going to watch for poor Bertie.”

“We thought you would come straight to Terzia by train,” Eleanor said to him. “I did not like your arriving there and finding no one to receive you. I deputed my cousin, Mr. Ames, to go and meet you.”

She sat down by the tea-table, and began rearranging the cups and saucers. A silence fell on her, and for a few moments she appeared to be somewhat oblivious of the presence of her guest.

Philip sat down in the nearest chair, crossed his legs, and slowly pulled first one side and then the other of his thick moustache with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand in a meditative fashion. Several things in the course of the last hour had surprised him a little. He did not feel quite at home with his new circumstances.

As Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay handed him his

teacup, she looked up with a sudden change of expression.

"What do you think of my step-daughter?" she asked.

The question was so wholly unexpected that Colonel Enderby paused for a moment before answering it. During that brief pause he was acutely sensible of the clear tones of the girl's voice—talking half-mockingly to the monkey—which came in, along with the sunshine, at the open window.

"I think that your step-daughter has grown into a very beautiful person," he said at last, with a certain seriousness.

"Ah, you too!" cried his hostess.

Perhaps there was the faintest savour of irritation in her manner. Any way, she did not enlarge upon the subject. She talked on, pleasantly enough, about less personal matters—friends in England, the Colonel's journey and so forth, for some minutes, then asked one or two questions about Matthew Enderby's last illness, about Bassett Darcy and the disposition of the property.

"It seems to me you have been very badly used, Colonel Enderby," she said at

last. "And I suppose, with your usual generosity, you submitted to be despoiled without a single protest."

The Colonel smiled. He was not accustomed to the overflowings of feminine sympathy, or the picturesqueness of feminine statement. They struck him both as amusing and violent.

"That is rather a hard way of putting it, you know," he answered.

He did not particularly enjoy discussing his own affairs with Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay—or any one else, for that matter.

"My father had a perfect right to leave his property as he liked. He knew that I was provided for under my poor mother's will."

"But then there is a recognized custom in these things. You must have always expected to possess the place eventually. You must have looked forward to it—dreamed about it, taken it for granted. No, it seems to me a wretched injustice."

"Hardly as bad as that," said the Colonel. He wanted to take the matter as lightly as possible. "I've wandered about the world

too much to be fit to settle down, at my age, into a regular country squire—at least that is what my father thought, no doubt—and quite reasonably too. Of course, being so much out of England, I have lost touch of a whole lot of things—it was inevitable. Now, my brother has been on the spot all the time; he knows all about the place, and so is much more fitted for that sort of life than I am. He's a capital fellow," added Colonel Enderby, heartily. "He's a first-rate farmer and sportsman, and a useful man, too, in the county. He's got a lot of common sense. Then he's married, you know, and has a family, and that, of course, makes a difference."

"I really can't see that it makes the smallest difference." Eleanor looked up at him very prettily. "A man at your age—specially, perhaps, in your profession—is in the prime of life. You haven't taken a vow of celibacy, I suppose? You may marry too."

Colonel Enderby shook his head. He looked at his boots, he smiled, but with no exuberant cheerfulness.

"No, no, I shall never marry, my dear madam," he answered quietly.

At this moment Jessie came in at the open window.

"Bertie has arrived," she said. "He has driven back. He will certainly be very cross."

"I am sorry," remarked Philip, getting up and setting down his teacup, "that I should have given Mr. Ames all this unnecessary trouble."

Jessie turned to him with the most dainty and reconciling air of amusement. Certainly she was admirably pretty.

"Don't be sorry. It does not in the least signify. Bertie is rather grateful in his heart of hearts to any one who will supply him with a legitimate excuse for ill-temper. He enjoys being"—the girl made a graceful little outward gesture with her two hands—"like that, you know, slightly ill-used and injured."

"Jessie, you are malicious." Eleanor spoke sharply, and her face darkened.

The young lady rested her hand for a moment caressingly on her step-mother's shoulder.

“What could I say, little mamma?” she asked. “It was a choice between Colonel Enderby’s peace of mind and poor Bertie’s reputation.”

There was a sound of footsteps on the stairs. The monkey gave an odd, sharp cry, and ran quickly in at the open window and across the room. It looked even more grotesque and uncanny, perhaps, when it subsided into a mere animal, and went honestly on all fours, than when it stood or sat upright with an assumption of discreet and human attitudes. As the door opened, the monkey sprang nimbly off the floor into the arms of the young man who entered, making as it did so strange caressing noises.

“Poor little abomination!” said Mr. Ames, as he stroked and fondled the creature.

He came on slowly into the room, looking rather hard at Colonel Enderby meantime.

“Ah! you have arrived, then,” he continued. “I have had the misfortune of missing you.”

Somehow Philip did not relish being

taken so entirely for granted. He would have preferred a more formal and regular mode of introduction.

"I am afraid," he said stiffly, "that I have given you a lot of unnecessary trouble."

"No, no," answered the other man. "Pray don't mention it. It didn't matter. It passed the time, you know; and that, after all, is as much as the most interesting occupation can do for one really."

Mr. Ames, judging by his appearance, was in age something over thirty. He was a good-looking young gentleman, with a dark, pale, and rather sleepy face, short pointed black beard and moustache, and black eyebrows—nearly meeting above the nose and running up a little at the ends. He was dressed with elaborate precision, in the latest English fashion; but an indescribable touch of floridness in the cut of his garments made the Colonel pretty sure an Italian tailor must be, after all, responsible for the production of them. In his button-hole Mr. Ames wore an extremely fine white gardenia.

“Give me some tea instantly, dear cousin Nell,” he said, subsiding languidly into a large arm-chair and addressing Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay. “I conclude you drove out from Genoa?” he added, looking towards Colonel Enderby.

It was observable that his voice was singularly full and sweet, while his dark eyes were nearly as mournful as those of the monkey on his knee.

The Colonel admitted, briefly, that he had driven out from Genoa.

“It is a beastly road,” said Mr. Ames, very gently. “Three lumps of sugar, dear Eleanor, please; you always forget my number. And a lump for Malvolio too, please. There, there, quietly, my poor lamb! Let us avoid unnecessary violence,” he went on, as the monkey snatched, chattering, at the piece of sugar she held out to it.

Philip did not stay very late at the Villa Mortelli that evening. He parted from his hostess on the terrace. Antonio, the Italian cook,—in a white linen jacket, blue trousers and very ornate smoking-cap, with a large

pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, a ferocious grey moustache, and the air of a distinguished field-marshal at least,—stood in the doorway, holding the Colonel's travelling-bag and bundle of wraps, and waiting to show him the way down to the hotel at Terzia.

The sky, in which the stars and crescent moon shone with a cold steady radiance, stretched a vast dome of purple black over land and sea. The waves lisped and murmured on the beach far below. The croaking of innumerable frogs came from the reservoir away among the vineyards. Wafts of warm air, laden with rich faint scent of orange and lemon blossom, swept round the house from the tangled garden beyond. Up at one of the villages on the mountain side there was a *festa*, and every house was illuminated with rows of candles along each window-ledge, gleaming and twinkling, faint and yellow, through the clear air. The foreground of terrace and vineyards and roadway lay frosted with moonlight and blotted with black shadow.

“Good-night, my dear friend,” said Eleanor Pierce-Dawnay.

She held the Colonel’s hand in both hers, and looked at him with a strangely restless appealing expression in her fine eyes.

“I don’t know how to thank you enough for coming to me. I shall expect you early to-morrow. I have so much to talk over with you. To-night I would not trouble you, but I need your help.”

Eleanor checked herself abruptly. Bertie Ames sauntered out from the house and stood beside her.

“Cousin Nell,” he said, in his rich, soft voice, “you and Jessie will catch all the colds in the world out here without any shawls. The night is romantic, no doubt, but, unfortunately, it is also chilly.”

The girl treated Colonel Enderby to one of her brilliant smiles as she bade him good-bye.

“*Au revoir*,” she said. “And the bon-bons—shall I really have them?”

Looking back when he had gone half-

way down the carriage road to the iron gates, Colonel Enderby could still see Mr. Ames and Jessie. They stood together, side by side, on the terrace, in the pale moonlight, a black figure and a white one. Suddenly the young girl's laugh rang out clear and sweet through the silence.

“Ah! truly our signorina is an angel,” said Antonio, devoutly. “It will be a sad day for the red villa when madame marries her daughter.”

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH THE COLONEL TAKES STOCK OF HIS
POSITION.

It appeared to Mr. Edmund Drake, who had followed his friend out from Genoa, that he waited a very long while for Colonel Enderby in the smoking-room of the Grand Hotel at Terzia that evening. The good gentleman's mind was not, it must be conceded, of the order which feeds willingly and profitably on itself. Solitude and meditation had never struck him as salutary, or in any degree inspiring. There was, indeed, nothing hermit-like about Mr. Drake's appearance; but rather a certain light and roving quality, which made him suggestive of an elderly, but still able-bodied, butterfly. With praiseworthy diligence he was wont to flutter from amusement to amusement, killing time

pertinaciously and with admirable gaiety of heart. He was a constant diner-out. He liked balls, garden parties, and festivities generally. He hunted with the Midlandshire hounds from the beginning of November till the end of March; took rooms in one of those knowing little streets off Piccadilly for June and July; found himself among the purple stretches of the Scotch moors, or by the side of some brawling salmon river in August; paid a round of visits in pleasant country houses, with a view to shooting, in September and October; and settled down again for the serious business of the winter in his capital little bachelor establishment at Tullingworth in time for the third meet of the season, which, as everybody knows, is held at Bassett Darcy.

April and May were off-months, so to speak, with Mr. Drake. He was very grateful to any one who would suggest to him an enjoyable method of passing them; and when, this year, his old and valued friend, Philip Enderby, had proposed a run on the Continent, Mr. Drake accepted the

idea with alacrity and enthusiasm. He had a pretty little taste in pictures and music of the lighter sort; and, as the home of the arts, he cherished a great kindness for Italy. It seemed to him rather clever and up to the mark to visit that profoundly picturesque country now and again. He liked to be able to say, "When I was in Rome in '57," or, "When I was on my way to Venice in '65." It sounded well, and served to impress some fair neighbour at a provincial dinner-party with the notion that she had the honour of sitting by a travelled and intelligent man of the world, who might be expected to look at life generally from a comprehensive and cosmopolitan standpoint.

And it must be owned that even now, though rotund in the central region of his person, though grey about the moustache and whiskers, though bald—yes, lamentably bald on the crown of his head, which rose white and shining, above a thick semicircle of grizzled hair—even now Mr. Drake was penetrated with a constant desire to impress and captivate the members of the opposite sex. His vanity in this matter was de-

liciously *naïf*. He professed a deep and searching knowledge of feminine peculiarities; and being, in point of fact, an eminently modest and well-conducted person, loved to represent himself as a terrible rake, a very Don Juan of a fellow, full of perilous dissimulation, and as inflammable as gun-cotton.

When Colonel Enderby at last entered the smoking-room that evening, Mr. Drake received him with a lively sense of satisfaction. He laid down the meagre pages of *Galignani*, from which he had been vainly trying to extract some small amount of mental sustenance, with an air of evident relief and applied himself vigorously to conversation.

“Not half a bad place this,” he said; “and really they gave us a first-rate dinner. They’re trying to work the hotel into popularity just now, you see, it being quite new, and good feeding pays as an advertisement. There are a very tidy set of people here, too, take ’em all round. A very effective-looking Russian woman just opposite to me at table this evening—I wished

I'd been nearer to her. You must observe her to-morrow, Enderby. Upon my word, she's worth looking at. The everlasting English parson here, of course—little red-haired fellow this time, with a face like a ferret. He's got his wife, and a couple of sisters-in-law—I take them to be by their looks—with him. Very plain, well-meaning sort of people, you know. The English all seem to me pretty fair. But there are half a dozen Germans—greedy, noisy, ill-dressed lot, I must say. I came over just after '66, you know, and the Germans were offensive enough then, in all conscience; but this last war has regularly brutalized them. They can't forget it, even now. Their swagger is disgusting," exclaimed Mr. Drake—"simply disgusting!"

He threw himself back on the broad orange-and-black covered divan, fitted against the wall of the room. "Brutes!" he said under his breath, and then fell to humming a gay air from *La fille de Madame Angot*, to restore his imperilled equilibrium.

Colonel Enderby, meanwhile, sat himself down in an angle of the afore-mentioned

divan, which, along with a few marble-topped tables and a generous supply of mirrors and spittoons, constituted the entire furniture of the lofty light-coloured room. His sympathies being by no means strongly Gallic, he ignored the subject of his friend's discourse, and applied himself to matters nearer home.

"I'm glad you like the place," he said. "Should you mind staying on here a day longer? It seems that Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay wants to talk over some business matters with me to-morrow. Probably I shan't be of the slightest use to her, but I must listen, at all events. And she insists on our both dining there to-morrow night. You won't mind, Drake, eh?"

"Delighted, I'm sure," replied the other man, cordially. "I'll poke about here in the morning, you know, and just run into Genoa in the afternoon, while you're busy."

Colonel Enderby was not in particularly good spirits. He lighted his cigar, and sat smoking in silence, staring vaguely at the well-laid *parquet* floor between his feet.

Mr. Drake, however, wanted to talk. He fidgeted with *Galignani*, hummed *Madame Angot* with increasing vivacity, and at last, no longer able to contain himself, embarked in an inquiry.

"Well, and how did you find Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay?" he asked. "I only saw her once—years ago. Good-looking woman, and promised to improve."

"I don't know that she has altogether fulfilled that promise," observed the Colonel, drily. "But as far as looks go, she's handsome enough still."

Mr. Drake fidgeted about again for a minute or so.

"Well, and what about the little girl?" he inquired lightly.

"Oh, she's grown up as little girls will."

"Pretty?"

"Very pretty," said Philip, with a certain finality in his tone.

Few things are more vexing to your thorough-paced gossip than to be answered in this poverty-stricken sort of fashion. But Edmund Drake was not easily put off; he returned valiantly to the charge.

"Anybody else there?" he asked, after a time.

Colonel Enderby raised his eyes with a questioning expression.

"There—where?" he said. "Oh! at the Villa Mortelli? Yes, a nice, gentle, little person in grey, who put in an appearance at dinner—*dame de compagnie*, I suppose; and an infernally ugly monkey; and a cousin of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's—a young man." The Colonel leant back and crossed his legs. "I didn't quite fancy the young man somehow," he added presently.

"Ah! one rarely does fancy the young man, you know, when one's getting well on towards fifty," remarked Mr. Drake, with a chuckle. "Well, I shall turn in now, I think, Enderby; and I strongly recommend you to do the same. Nothing like a good night's rest for bringing one round after a long journey, you know."

Philip, however, did not take the excellent advice thus offered him. He sat up rather late.

More than once Galli, the head waiter, clothed in funereal black, with a napkin

over his arm, and flat, tired, slippered feet, looked in to see if the English Colonel had not at last retired, so that he might put out the gas and go to bed himself. Galli had a noble head and pale, finely chiselled face, set in a frame of crisp black beard and crisp black hair, suggestive of some impassive and world-weary Roman emperor. In point of fact, his soul was more in harmony with his slippered feet than with his imperial head. It was a common, patient, unimportant little soul, quite capable of thrilling into ecstasy over a tip of five francs. The mark of a stupendous history and civilization has stamped itself in royal characters on so many Italian faces, behind which there really is nothing at all, except slightly amiable vacuity. Galli looked in at the smoking-room door, saw Colonel Enderby was still there, and went humbly away again, to meditate in silence and loneliness among his table-cloths, glasses, and decanters.

Philip sat and smoked and thought, or rather ruminated; for when men of the Colonel's type are not actively engaged

about some practical matter, they can hardly be said to think. Their mental processes are chiefly pictorial, I fancy; not so much a matter of words and ideas, as of scenes and impressions.

The gas burned with a yellow, unsteady light, revealing very fully the nakedness of the room. In the corridor just beyond, Mr. Drake's enemies, the lively, not to say uproarious, party of Teutons were playing cards, and indulging freely in those strange interjectional snortings and gruntings that form such an integral part of German conversation.

His surroundings were far from romantic; and yet the pictures which presented themselves to Philip Enderby's mind were undoubtedly touched with the delightful finger of romance. The events of the afternoon had stimulated his memory to a remarkable degree. He seemed to see poor, good-looking, rickety Beau Pierce-Dawnay once more, as he lay tossing restlessly on his narrow camp bed, through the long hours of semi-tropic nights—half wild with fever and exhaustion, crying tears of impotent

misery and weakness, and raving about his young wife and his "darling little Jessie," whom he would never see again. Philip had been with poor Beau when he died, and had promised—with the fervour natural to such a moment—to look after the dying man's wife and child. He had kept his promise, too, with perhaps unusual faithfulness—for that same fervour of the watcher beside the death-bed, cools down sensibly, as a rule, after the funeral: and what was originally embraced as a sacred duty, appears too often, later, as something allied to a bore. But Philip had really applied his mind to helping his friend's widow. He had extracted her jointure from a recalcitrant father-in-law; had advised her successfully regarding her affairs on several occasions—Eleanor had rather a gift for getting into what are vulgarly called tight places—and had held himself ready, at all times, to come to her if she should send for him. For the last few years their relation had been a less intimate one, it is true; yet the Colonel had never regarded himself as released from his old engagement.

The Germans finished their game. They got up with a sound of loud talk and laughter, a scraping of chairs and clatter of boot-heels on the marble floor. Galli looked in for a moment, tired, but acquiescent in whatever state of things might be revealed to him. But Philip Enderby sat still on the orange-and-black divan, his legs crossed, his steady blue eyes staring at nothing in particular, a queer smile about his lips, and the stump of his cigar fading from crimson heat to grey ash between his fingers.

A fair young face smiled at him from under a great red umbrella, and a light slender figure flitted before him in the gloom of a wide dusky stairway, and merry mocking words wandered in through a sunny window. A hundred dainty little movements and charming glances forced themselves on his remembrance; and all the while, with ancient wizened countenance, a monkey grinned and chattered at him; and a young man—well, no, not a young man exactly, but a decidedly younger man than Colonel Enderby—stood by, mournful, cynical, and it must be owned,

most unnecessarily good-looking into the bargain.

The Colonel sat up and shook himself. He did not half like his own imaginations. His state of mind was decidedly abnormal, and it worried him. Then his thoughts wandered back to Cecilia Murray, his old love. Yes, he had been true to her, very true, on the whole,—even when it was quite useless to be so. A certain tenderness came over him even now whenever he thought of her. Ah! how different things might have been if he had married her years ago, and if, in due time, Bassett Darcy had come to him!

Philip had visions of himself, solidly prosperous, settled in life, with a wife who had become a sort of second self to him, and a troop of growing boys and girls around him; hunting three or four times a week; riding over on Board days to Slowby; going to church soberly on Sunday; busy with pleasant homely matters; building good cottages; giving away beef and pudding to the labourers' wives at Christmas; wandering about on nice, dull, dewy mornings,

with a spud in his hand, and vexing seriously because there were so many plantains in the turf on the lawns. He sighed. Yes, notwithstanding his assertions made to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay a few hours before, *that* was the life he was really cut out for—ordinary, sensible, and responsible, touched with kindly humour, and backed with dignified comfort. Renunciation is not such an easy matter, after all. You may fast of your own free will, and not because you are compelled to; but you will feel as hungry for the food you deny yourself as for food that is denied you. Colonel Enderby had forgiven his father, he harboured no grudge against his younger brother; but he was not very cheerful all the same. He got up and took one or two turns up and down the room. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, he stood still in front of one of the mirrors, and took a good, long, honest look at himself.

The impression he received was not an encouraging one, somehow.

“Drake was right,” he said, a little inconsequently. “I’m nearly fifty. It’s all very well, but there are a number of things

you must do before then if you're going to do them at all. I feel as if a little fighting would be rather a comfort just now," he added.

The Colonel moved across to the table again, and picked up his cigar-case and box of fusees.

"I'd better go to bed. I'm out of sorts, I think, to-night. The day after to-morrow we'll go on to Spezia ; Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay will have said her say by then, I suppose."

Just outside the door he nearly ran into Galli—yawning, but mild, and still clinging to his napkin. Philip Enderby was struck with sudden compunction ; he said a few civil words to the man about having kept him up so late.

Galli bowed and smiled faintly—a well-bred, if discrowned Cæsar.

"We are accustomed," he remarked vaguely. "The German gentlemen have but lately finished. I wait to see to the gas."

And with shuffling footsteps he passed along into the empty smoking-room.

CHAPTER IV.

“LE DESSOUS DES CARTES.”

For reasons which he would have found it difficult to define, Philip put off his visit to the Villa Mortelli, next day, till the afternoon. He did his best to maintain a very British and unimpressible frame of mind. Accompanied by that lively and self-important little man, Mr. Drake, he explored the not very promising town of Terzia in the morning; looked in at the lofty, stuffy, painted church, and pronounced it tawdry; lingered for a few minutes at the great straggling station, and remarked, with a grain of contempt, how slovenly and slipshod all Italian railroad arrangements appeared to be; loitered down on the grey beach, in the brilliant sunshine, watching the great blue-green rollers come in in end-

less succession, and break in hollow thunder and snowy foam at his feet, and declared he had seen a ten-times finer ground sea on the west coast of England. The Colonel was sensible of a strong instinct of self-protection at this juncture. He felt the desirability of cultivating a number of wholesome British prejudices. The feeling amused him, even while he recognized its wisdom.

About half-past two o'clock he arrived at the little red villa. The sky was absolutely clear, and the whole place seemed to sleep in the rich glowing sunshine. The front door stood open on to the terrace. Philip rang; waited; rang again, and then, getting bored both with the delay and the heat, went indoors and upstairs.

The drawing-room door stood open too. From within came the sound of a piano. Some one was playing brilliantly, almost riotously, a valse. There is an indescribable underlying pathos in dance music—everybody knows it; a heartache behind all the laughter, a weariness below all the rapid movement, a question, a doubt, a misgiving, under all the radiance and joy.

Colonel Enderby did not quite care to acknowledge the penetrating sentiment of the music just then. He knocked at the door, as no servant was visible, and then walked straight into the room. As he did so, the valse sank away into a tender regretful passage.

Jessie Pierce-Dawnay was at the piano. Apparently she was absorbed in her own performance. Her pretty head was thrown back, and her light figure showed up with a very telling distinctness against the shaded corner of the room beyond the instrument. In a low chair by her side Mr. Ames lounged, slowly cutting the pages of a yellow French novel, and whistling the air of the valse softly as he did so. At the sound of Colonel Enderby's footsteps, he looked up.

"Ah!" he said gently.

The young girl looked round too. She got up quickly and came forward, her face irradiated with one of those delightful smiles.

"You are very late," she said. "Did you get tired of us all last night? We expected

you to luncheon at half-past twelve ; but perhaps you did well in not coming. You would have found Bertie and me alone. Miss Keat has gone into Genoa ; Mamma has one of her headaches, and is invisible."

Mr. Ames, meanwhile, rose slowly from his chair.

"I hope they gave you decent rooms," he observed, in his sweet, drawling voice. "I spoke beforehand ; I did what I could ; I was assured that you would be treated *en prince*. But a hotel-keeper's business is to tell one lies, you know."

"I did very well, thanks," Colonel Enderby answered, rather shortly. Then he turned to Jessie again, and made one or two necessary and civil inquiries respecting her stepmother.

"Ah ! mamma's headaches are very distressing," she said. "They are nervous. When they come on, mamma succumbs ; she disappears entirely. As for us, we are very sorry, of course, but we have grown accustomed to it ; we wait till she reappears, and then we proceed as usual. Bertie

suffers at times, too," she added ; " but he doesn't disappear. He remains, and I have to amuse him."

"In that case Mr. Ames is hardly deserving of much pity," said Philip.

The young lady was really very captivating as she stood there looking with a sort of mischievous innocence from one of her companions to the other.

"I am to be pitied, though, a good deal, sometimes," she answered. "Bertie is not easy to entertain. He becomes tired of everything. He says he has got beyond it. He has a most beautiful voice, Colonel Enderby, but he will never sing now ; he says he has got beyond that. The phrase is odious to me."

The girl spoke with some warmth. Mr. Ames went on quietly cutting the pages of his novel.

"My dear little cousin," he said, "your experience of life is as yet, happily for you, very limited. I will preach you a little sermon."

"Oh, pray don't," said Jessie, quickly, putting up her eyebrows. "I have the most lively objection to sermons."

"I know," he answered. "For an English girl your education has been deplorably neglected in that particular. But if you knew more of the world, you would be vividly aware that the chief business of a reasonable being consists in getting beyond things. Ask Colonel Enderby," he added, glancing up suddenly, "if he is not unpleasantly conscious of having got beyond a whole number of things by now."

"Have you?" said Jessie, almost seriously.

The whole spirit of the conversation was distasteful to Philip. He had taken a dislike to Mr. Ames, who struck him as sententious, and at moments even offensive, with his languor, and his drawl, and his over-delicate manner. The question, too, reminded him, with irritating distinctness, of his unsatisfactory colloquy with the looking-glass in the smoking-room the night before. He paused a moment before answering. The girl repeated her question, looking in his face all the while with curious directness.

"Yes," he said, rather sadly; "I'm afraid

I have got beyond a good many things too, Miss Pierce-Dawnay."

"Ah! dear me," she sighed; "what a pity!"

Still she stood gazing questioningly at him. The Colonel felt himself singularly moved by that lingering inspection.

Bertie Ames laughed gently.

"I told you so, Jessie," he said. "The law is of universal application. See, it holds equally good in the case of myself and Colonel Enderby—if I may venture, in passing, to associate my obscure name with his illustrious one. Everybody gets beyond everything, to put it vulgarly. I am almost past this last novel of Daudet's. And the day will come, Jessie, when a new gown—even one from Paris—will cease to give you any very active satisfaction."

"No, no, no!" cried the girl, piteously. Her pretty eyes filled with tears, and she moved two or three steps away from him, and nearer to the Colonel.

"Don't say that—don't spoil it all! It isn't true, Bertie," she cried. "Say it isn't true," she went on, turning to Colonel En-

derby—coming so close to him that he perceived quite strongly the scent of a little bunch of grey violets which she wore in the bosom of her dress—“tell me it isn’t true; tell me I shall always go on enjoying things. I enjoy them so much now. Don’t let Bertie make me miserable.”

At this moment Philip stood undoubtedly in need of all those self-protective instincts which he had sought to cultivate earlier in the day. The situation was a slightly dangerous one. For an instant he was tempted to do an exquisitely silly thing. He was tempted to gather this pretty appealing child into his strong arms and swear—an oath, by the way, quite impossible to keep—that neither Mr. Bertie Ames or any one else should ever give her a moment’s distress again. Fortunately, however, most people only do a tithe of the foolish things they are tempted to do. Colonel Enderby drew himself up. He even moved a little farther away. His heart may have beat rather quick for the moment, but that he could not prevent. He glanced at Bertie, who leant easily

on the top of the piano, and watched him with a suspicion of lurking amusement in the expression of his handsome face.

“My dear young lady,” he said quietly, “if people get discontented and miserable, they have generally only themselves to thank for it, in the long run. One need never, except through one’s own fault, get beyond enjoying the things which are really worth most in life.”

There was a pause after the Colonel had thus made his confession of faith. Then Mr. Ames observed, but so mildly and amiably that it was impossible to be very wrath with him—

“Pardon me, but I wonder whether you really believe that?”

Just at this moment Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay rustled into the room, closely followed by the austere form of Parker, bearing cushions, eau-de-cologne, and various *et ceteras*.

“Ah, Colonel Enderby,” she said, with a certain weariness of manner which was not without its charm, “I have been expecting you. Why didn’t you come earlier?”

As she spoke Eleanor looked rather hard at the Colonel, erect, serious—even a trifle savage ; at the young girl, with her flushed face and still misty eyes ; and, lastly, at Bertie Ames, leaning indolently on the top of the piano. Her expression changed sensibly, and she spoke perhaps with a grain of uncalled-for rapidity and decision.

“Parker, you may take all those things back into the little drawing-room again, please. I am not very well to-day, not equal to much,” she continued, addressing Philip ; “still, I cannot afford to waste the precious hours of your visit. I should like to have some quiet talk with you, Colonel Enderby. Will you come with me into my sanctum ? It is cooler there, and we shall be alone.”

Then she placed her hand on her step-daughter’s shoulder and said, “You look tired, Jessie. Take a book, and go to your own room and rest.”

“And me ?” inquired Mr. Ames, gently, “and me, cousin Nell ? In your scheme of universal benevolence, am I to be left out in the cold, or will you kindly devise a suitable occupation for me also ?”

Eleanor turned to him with a flash in her eyes.

"You can ring for the monkey," she said briefly.

"Ah, just so. The idea is an admirable one. I too am provided for. Thanks. I may ring for the monkey."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay looked at Philip. "Let us come," she said, as she moved towards the door.

The Colonel followed her across the landing to another room, though inwardly he was just a shade reluctant to do so. He liked plain sailing, a simple straightforward manner of conducting life; and he began to suspect that plain sailing was by no means the custom of this slightly eccentric household. He was becoming conscious that a good deal was going on around him which he could not fathom, and he did not in the least enjoy it.

When Mr. Ames was alone, he subsided into the deep arm-chair again.

"Cousin Nell becomes enigmatical," he said, half aloud.

If Philip Enderby was already on the

look-out for cross currents, and sunken rocks, and shifting winds, his talk with his hostess that afternoon was by no means calculated to reassure him. The preparations for it in the way of smelling-bottles and cushions were alone suggestive of embarrassing possibilities, to a man unused to the habits and requirements of womankind. Then, too, an effect of restlessness, of hardly repressed emotion, which was observable in Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's manner, perplexed him. In a way, he was a little afraid of this stormy handsome woman in her present mood. She struck him as likely to make strange propositions, and prove somewhat unmanageable if they were not complied with. Mentally, he repeated his decision of leaving Terzia on the morrow.

After some desultory conversation as to his plans—where he was going, and what he proposed to see—Eleanor said, with a certain solemnity in her tone—

“Colonel Enderby, you mustn't suppose I asked you to put yourself out of the way and come here to see me on some merely frivolous pretext. I want you to be so good

as to give me your advice in a difficult and delicate matter. There are reasons which seem to give you a claim in this question. You were my husband's best friend, and so, in this case, I instinctively turn to you. Will you permit me to speak quite freely?"

The Colonel assented courteously enough. What else could he do? Yet he was sensible of growing discomfort. The room was cool, but the shut and darkened windows produced an effect of airlessness. It was sweet, too, with the scent of flowers, and his hostess, with her serious intense face, sitting on the old-fashioned sofa opposite to him, made a sufficiently telling and graceful picture. But Philip refused to be impressed. Perhaps he was suffering a reaction after his moment of keen feeling in the drawing-room just before. He was not in quite a sympathetic attitude of mind, and yet his loyalty to his old brother-in-arms made him wish to be helpful to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay if he could.

"I have great confidence in your judgment," she went on. "I cannot trust myself; I can't be as dispassionate as I

want to be. But I can trust you, Colonel Enderby. Think of all I owe you, as it is."

"Pray don't say that," he interrupted. "Your husband was my very dear friend. I have merely tried to pay—very inadequately—a debt I owed to the dead——"

The Colonel paused. His expression was pathetic, modest, charming, as he looked across at her.

Eleanor was a person of quick perceptions. She had a very high respect for her companion. She felt, too, at this moment, that a dividing wall was, so to speak, broken down between them, and that they had moved several steps nearer to each other in intimacy.

"I know, I know," she returned warmly; "and it gives me more confidence now. I am horribly perplexed. You must advise me. Tell me," she went on, speaking quickly, "tell me, what shall I do with my step-daughter, with poor Beaumont's child?"

Philip Enderby was startled.

"Good heavens! Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, what do you mean?"

"Oh, don't misunderstand me," she an-

swered. "I don't mean anything very extraordinary. Jessie has reached an age when it becomes necessary to think of her future. She is attractive, she has had many admirers."

"No doubt," murmured Philip, almost involuntarily.

"Foreign ways are different to English ones, you know. Parents here take a much more active interest in their children's prospects than is customary at home. They look forward. They consult with some chosen friend; they decide on a course of action, and carry it out."

The Colonel began to see what was coming. Under other circumstances the position he was called upon so unexpectedly to occupy might have struck him as an amusing one. But for some reason he was not in the least inclined to look at the question of Jessie's future from a humorous point of view. He was moved to disclaim, quite hotly, any share in providing for the young lady's happiness.

"You must pardon me," he said. "In all business matters I am glad to be of

service to you in any way I can; but this question is altogether outside the range of my capacity. I have not any qualifications for the part of adviser regarding your step-daughter's future. Remember, I had not seen her since she was quite a child till yesterday. I know absolutely nothing of her tastes and inclinations; any interference on my part would be simply grotesque."

Philip leant back stiffly in his chair, and looked away.

"I am sorry, but I must refuse to discuss this matter," he continued. "It places me altogether in a false position. Surely some one else—your cousin, Mr. Ames, for instance—is far better qualified to advise you than I am."

Directly the words were out of his mouth, Philip regretted them. It was odious to him to think of that languid disillusioned young man having a hand in the fate of the pretty child who had implored him so passionately "not to let Bertie make her miserable" only half an hour ago. The Colonel felt as if he had been guilty of an

act of treachery. He was furious with himself.

His hostess, too, was perhaps a trifle nettled at his very plain refusal to do what she asked of him; but outwardly she dominated her displeasure.

"I understand your feeling," she said. "I half expected you would object at first, and I respect you for doing so. But we can't let the conversation end like this. I must explain myself a little further. At the risk of annoying you, I shall go on."

Eleanor sat up; she leant her elbow on the arm of the sofa, and fingered the carved woodwork of it rather restlessly as she spoke.

"In mentioning Mr. Ames you have touched the root of all my perplexities. He is my second cousin. He has been living with us, off and on, for the last two years. Bertie's career has not been an altogether fortunate one. He has had a good deal to endure, one way and another. I think," she added, with a ring of genuine feeling in her voice, "that I have been of some little help to poor Bertie. Colonel

Enderby, you must bear with me ; you must let me tell you about him."

But the Colonel was growing decidedly restive. He was suspicious of these confidences ; he began to distrust whither they might lead. He wanted to cut the conversation short, to go away, to go out of doors—to do anything, in short, but sit here listening in this sweet, airless, oppressive atmosphere.

"You are tired, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay," he said, getting up and standing before her. "Don't you think it would be best to leave the story of Mr. Ames' troubles till to-morrow morning—till you are rested?"

"You would do me a real favour, Colonel Enderby, if you would listen now."

She turned her face to him suddenly ; it seemed pale and haggard in the soft light.

"Pray, pray, listen now," she went on, speaking low and hurriedly, clasping her hands, and leaning forward with her eyes fixed on his face. "You are honest and true, and I am horribly lonely ; I am in great distress. I can't tell you altogether

why; you must take my word partly on trust. Perhaps I shouldn't have spoken so soon, but I am low and nervous to-day. I hate all that pitiless sunshine, and glare, and glitter outside; it distracts me. I am getting worn out, and I can't be cautious, and diplomatic any longer. I have wanted some one to speak to for weeks and months. Of course, all this seems weak, excited, ridiculous, exaggerated to you; but listen to me, Colonel Enderby, not for my sake, but for the sake of my dead husband, who trusted you—for his sake, hear me out."

The Colonel sat down again. It was all very painful, very unpleasant; but it would be nothing short of brutal to leave a woman pleading for a hearing in that desperate way, and Philip was very far from being a brute.

"Thank you," she said eagerly.

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay pressed her handkerchief hard against her lips; she was altogether unstrung. She had a choking sensation in her throat, and, for a few seconds, was on the edge of an outburst of hysterical sob-

bing; but she mastered herself by an effort of will, which her companion could not help admiring. She set her teeth, gave herself a petulant little shake, and then began speaking again calmly.

“Bertie’s mother was an Italian,” she said. “His father was a banker in Milan. I used to be with them a good deal, years ago, before I married. However, that’s neither here nor there. Bertie has money and no profession. He fell wildly in love with a young Italian lady of good family—a distant connection of his mother’s. Her parents had other views for their daughter, they would not hear of it. Bertie was not good enough for them, I suppose; they made his religion the objection. It has always struck me as, indeed, a case of the irony of fate, that poor dear Bertie, of all people in the world, should suffer in the cause of religion.”

Eleanor shifted her position slightly; she avoided looking at Colonel Enderby.

“The young lady married, as her parents desired her; she did not pretend to care a rap for her husband. She was a beautiful,

self-willed, emotional creature. I needn't go into particulars; the story is not a pleasant one. Everybody knew what was happening. Bertie Ames sacrificed his youth to this unfortunate *liaison*; it has blighted his whole life. The lady still cares for him—there have been terrible scenes at times—but he no longer cares, I think, for her. Yet, if her husband were to die, he would marry her to-morrow; he believes he is bound in honour to do so. Bertie's sense of honour is very fine."

Eleanor raised her eyes with a movement of pride as she finished speaking. For the life of him, Philip could not help smiling a little.

"Yes, it is," she cried, with energy. "He no longer cares, but he waits. He will not think of any one else. All his Italian friends laud him as a *preux chevalier*, a very model of constancy."

She paused, still looking up, almost defiantly. Colonel Enderby cleared his throat. He had disliked this young gentleman from the first; and that fact, probably, made him somewhat merciless. Personal feelings

insinuate themselves so cunningly into our judgments of others, and offer, on broad, general principles, such excellent justifications for their existence.

“That is a mistake on the part of Mr. Ames’ friends,” he remarked drily.

A dull flush came into Eleanor’s cheeks.

“Yes, from your point of view, I dare say it is; yet, remember, Bertie is more of an Italian than an Englishman. The standards in these matters are different here. But for the last few months I have been growing dreadfully anxious. I have noticed, I have feared that—well, that he was very much drawn towards Jessie. He won’t marry, he will never marry any woman but the Countess Tolomei. But, Colonel Enderby, think—think if Jessie comes to care for him.”

Colonel Enderby stood up all of a piece, as the saying is.

“Send him away,” he said, fiercely. “There is just that one thing to do; send him out of the house directly.”

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay flung back her hands wildly.

"I can't, I can't!" she cried. "Anything in the world but that."

Philip stared at her for a moment in dumb amazement. She was pale and scared.

Then as the meaning of her strange outburst began to dawn upon him, he turned away, half in pity, half with a sense of repulsion. The situation was painfully complicated.

Eleanor also had risen to her feet. There was a silence. Presently she spoke.

"I have been mad," she said hoarsely. "I have lost my head and betrayed myself. I have put myself to shame before you. Colonel Enderby, if you are a man of honour—and I know you are that—you will believe what I say now, and then go away and blot my insane self-betrayal out of your mind for ever. Bertie Ames does not dream of this; nobody in the world knows it."

There was a fine dignity about the woman at that moment.

Philip bowed silently. Words were obviously out of the question. Eleanor moved aside, and began nervously arranging some

cut flowers that stood on a dish on one of the tables.

The Colonel's mind was penetrated with the remembrance of Jessie. Poor child! her prospects, all things considered, seemed to him sufficiently melancholy. Again, he felt a strong movement of pity—of tenderness towards her. It seemed frightful that this pure, innocent, gay young life should be bound up with the dark unfruitful history he had just been listening to. He stood absorbed in thought. If only something could be done to help her!

Eleanor left off fingering the flowers, and moved about the room impatiently. With whatever sentiments of trust and confidence, with whatever vague hope of possible assistance she had begun her interview with Colonel Enderby, at this moment, in her hot shame and wounded pride, she desired most cordially to be rid of him.

“You leave here to-morrow I think you said?” she observed at last, over her shoulder.

Philip was not prepared for the question. It forced him to come to a sudden decision.

"No," he answered slowly; "I think I shall remain here for a few days longer—that is, of course, if you will permit me to do so."

There was a perceptible interval of silence before Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's answer came.

"It will be delightful," she said at last. "Shall we come into the other room? Miss Keat and the others will be there. It seems to me rather oppressive here."

"Thank you, I think I won't stay now," he responded; "I rather want a walk. I'll come back, with my friend Drake, to dinner."

As the two friends were going down to the hotel that night, Mr. Drake suddenly stopped short in the wavering yellow light of one of the few gas-lamps in the quaint, painted main street of Terzia, and looked full at his companion.

"I don't half like leaving you behind, somehow, Enderby," he said. "It's not merely the breaking up of our plans; though, of course, I'm sorry for that: but I take for granted your reasons for staying are good

enough, and so I accept them without any fuss."

The good little gentleman moved on again with his quick, self-important walk.

"I don't know what it is, but, hang it all, Enderby, I feel nervous about you."

Philip laughed in a very cheery, reassuring way.

"You have a wonderful imagination, Drake," he said. "Why, what on earth do you take it is going to happen to me?"

"I don't mind the widow," observed the other man, apparently rather inconsequently; "I'd trust her, I think. At bottom she's a good woman—flighty, of course, and all that sort of thing; but I'll back her to be sound enough here"—Mr. Drake thumped himself heavily in the region of the heart—"sound enough here, you know," he repeated. "But that little girl—upon my word, Enderby, somehow I fight uncommonly shy of that deucedly pretty little girl."

The Colonel looked down; he kicked the loose gravel on the walk of the hotel garden—which they were just then crossing

—with his foot, and laughed again, but this time with slight annoyance.

“A thousand to one,” he said, “you’ll never set eyes on Miss Pierce-Dawnay again, so really I don’t think that very much matters.”

CHAPTER V.

JESSIE SUGGESTS A REMEDY.

HAVING once committed himself to a line of action, it was Colonel Enderby's habit to stand by it, even when it failed, on more mature consideration, to commend itself very highly to his judgment. Inspired partly by his loyalty to Beaumont Pierce-Dawnay's memory, partly by a quick pity for the two women, whose position seemed to him such a critical and painful one, Philip had decided the evening before to stay on at Terzia. He was going to stick to his post; he was going somehow to see them through. And yet, when in the cheerless light of a very wet morning, he bade farewell to kind, fussy little Mr. Drake, and saw the latter gentleman pack himself and his baggage into the rattling omnibus, which

was to convey him into Genoa, Philip became conscious that perhaps he had undertaken a very foolish piece of business. It was all very well to talk of lines of action; but the unfortunate thing was, that he hadn't any line at all. He could not see his way in the least. He turned back into the large brightly painted hotel, which looked particularly frivolous and ephemeral on this gloomy morning, in anything but a sweet temper. He said to himself that "the whole thing was a nuisance, and that he had got himself into an infernally awkward fix:—" and, it must be owned, he said it with a will.

The Colonel's temper was not improved when, on sallying forth, some few hours later, in a mackintosh and heavy boots in defiance of the streaming rain, he met Mr. Ames just turning in at the gates of the hotel garden. Bertie was holding up a large umbrella, picking his way carefully along the sloppy pavement, and looking mildly disgusted, yet resigned. He had on a very light overcoat, and wore the inevitable white gardenia in his button-hole, a

trifle brown at the edges of the petals from the wet.

He nodded blandly to Colonel Enderby.

"I suppose you rather like this sort of weather? It seems home-like," he observed, with a sweet wistfulness of expression, which was by no means appeasing to a man in an irritable frame of mind.

Two minutes before Philip had felt no special objection to the rain. The dull sky was really rather a relief after all that gaudy sunlight. But for some occult reason, as Bertie spoke, his opinion went round to another quarter with all the velocity of a weather-cock on a gusty day.

"It's the most beastly morning I ever saw," he replied, with considerable asperity. "The whole place looks miserable. It seems to me this country can only look decent in a blaze of sunshine."

Mr. Ames smiled faintly.

"Yes, I understand just what you mean."

He took a leisurely survey of the large hotel, built round three sides of a square and coloured pink, with splendid imitations of stone pilasters and florid mouldings

painted in pale yellow, and the shadows they were fondly supposed to cast painted in pale green. Then he turned, and gazed down the many-coloured street behind him.

"I understand perfectly what you mean," he repeated. "It looks very like the inside of a theatre by daylight. You thorough-going English people dislike that; it strikes you as artificial. As for us, we others prefer our theatre, daylight or gaslight, to anything else in the world."

"It all appears to me very cheap and flimsy," said Colonel Enderby. "I can't think much of the beauty of a country when it can be spoilt by a few hours' rain."

He glanced critically at the other man's clothes as he spoke. Mr. Ames' dress provoked him. To-day Philip took great exception at his hat. It was too low in the crown, and too curled up at the sides. "Just like a shop-boy out for a Sunday," he said to himself.

"As we have satisfactorily disposed of the country, let us go on to the people," Bertie resumed, with much composure. He found a delicate pleasure in keeping his

companion standing here in the rain. "They remind me, now, very much of fowls on a wet day, depressed and draggled. I felt so like a fowl myself this morning, that I really had to come out. I wanted to stand about on one leg with other fowls, and make melancholy little noises. There is a natural desire for communion among the wretched, you know. I feel much better since I have stood about here with you."

This was going too far. The Colonel drew himself up.

"I think I'll walk on," he said curtly, and, turning away, passed rapidly down the dripping street.

"He is a very good-hearted barbarian, after all, I believe, though he doesn't like me," Bertie Ames said to himself, with commendable candour, as he picked his way across the hotel garden. "The British flavour is a little too pronounced, perhaps; but, poor man, he can't help that. I wonder what dear Cousin Nell really intends to do with him. Her inventive power is startling at moments."

Later that same day, Philip Enderby had

a short conversation with Jessie, which seemed to throw light on the situation. The rain had almost ceased; but the pale ragged clouds still hung low on the hill-sides, while the whole landscape seemed blotted in in cold tones of indigo and grey. The Colonel had been for a long walk. He had been trying hard to arrange his ideas, to make out what was the next step he had better take. To stay and do nothing to mend matters at the red villa was out of the question, and yet for the life of him he could not arrive at any distinct conclusion. All his plans had been put out; and he found himself stranded in a dull little foreign town, offering but small promise of occupation or entertainment to a man of his tastes, with a difficult and delicate piece of diplomacy on his hands. The Colonel felt himself to be a somewhat ill-used person, as he walked up to the front door of the Villa Mortelli that gloomy drizzling spring afternoon.

Just as he was going to ring he heard his name called, and, turning round, saw Jessie coming from the tangled garden beyond.

She was wrapped in a long cloak, with the hood of it pulled up over her head, framing the oval of her fair young face with a dark line. There was something pensive in her expression. The girl had gained an almost tragic interest in Colonel Enderby's eyes since his conversation with her step-mother. Her foes were those of her own household, poor child! It was sad. Altogether, she struck him as a very appealing little figure, standing there among the dripping leaves and rain-washed flowers in the dull afternoon light.

"I am so glad you have come," she said, "It has been a horrible day. Miss Keat has had bad news from England; she is going away to-morrow. To-day she has done nothing but pack and cry. Mamma has devoted herself to Miss Keat. Bertie went out early—he escaped. That is the disadvantage of being a girl; you cannot escape; you must stay."

Jessie delivered herself of this statement of her small woes, looking with pathetic frankness into Philip's face.

"I am wretched," she went on, turning

away, and pulling impatiently at a straggling rose-spray, which, as she touched it, sent a tiny cataract of water on to the shining gravel below. "I want the sunshine; I want to be amused."

At the risk of lowering the Colonel lamentably in the opinion of all sensible readers, I must admit that Jessie's petulant outburst, far from seeming silly or reprehensible in his eyes, touched him considerably. Unfortunately, you see, Philip was not the hero of an admirable middle-class fiction—a person bristling with respectabilities and moralities, whose life is ruled by common sense, and a lively discernment of probable profit and loss, and of the market value of a given article. He was only a plain, simple-minded gentleman, with a very tender heart under his stern manner, and a vein of poetry and romance in his composition which, at moments, sadly perverted the strictness of his judgment. Alas! there will always be men, I fear, in this singularly ill-regulated world, who never find a graceful girl more winning than when she laments that there are creases in her rose-leaves,

or sheds charming little pearl-like tears of desire for the moon or some other equally unattainable object.

"I am very sorry you are wretched," he answered gently. "It hardly seems fair, does it? Wretchedness might keep itself for older and"—he hesitated a moment, rather at a loss for the right word—"well, different sort of people to you. It does not seem quite appropriate at your age. But I am afraid I cannot bring back the sunshine for you."

Philip paused. He would have given a good deal to bring back the sunshine for this pretty child, in more senses than the immediate and obvious one. He felt rather fiercely towards Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay at that moment. He formulated an accusation against her. She wanted to get rid of the girl to serve her own purposes. It was unfaithful of her. In thought he accused her of being a dangerous and unscrupulous woman.

Jessie looked up at him with charming directness.

"I don't know that," she said. "I

believe you would do what you could. I like you very much, Colonel Enderby."

Philip, like many light-haired men, retained even at eight-and-forty a certain capacity for blushing. There was undoubtedly a deeper tone than usual in his face, as he answered—

"As much as in the days of dolls and bonbons?"

"Quite as much," said Jessie, promptly.

She drew the dark cloak more closely about her shoulders.

"Do you mind walking with me a little way?" she asked, after a moment's hesitation. "It is so cold standing still."

The Colonel did not mind it in the least. He was very much interested in Miss Pierce-Dawnay and in her future. He did not attempt to conceal that fact from himself. Why should he? Her father had been his friend. Philip had refused rather hotly, it is true, to co-operate actively with her step-mother the day before; but then, that was before all the facts of the case were before him. No man is quite consistent; even the most honest-minded

among us can find excellent reasons for following our own inclinations.

Anyhow, it happened that on that damp and sombre afternoon Colonel Enderby had a little walk with the young lady, which tended to make him entertain a much more amiable opinion of Terzia and its surroundings.

“I thought the other day I should like to talk to you,” she had said, when they were fairly started on the road leading down through the vineyards. “I want to ask you several things. I think you have influence with Mamma; perhaps you could speak to her. It is so dull here; I want to go away. Mamma says she requires retirement; but I don’t in the least require retirement. I was much happier at Florence. We went into society at Florence. And Bertie was nicer at Florence. He has been strange lately. He says all sorts of depressing things. He is very melancholy. He sits and stares at me.”

A sense of relief came over Philip. He could not have said precisely why.

“Do you mind very much being stared

at?" he inquired, looking at the girl by his side, and smiling.

"It is very creepy to be stared at by somebody who looks dismal and does not speak," she answered quickly. "Bertie is fond of reading scientific books about the origin of all sorts of things. He firmly believes that we are all descended from monkeys. I am inclined to think it must be true too, sometimes; for his eyes are exactly like Malvolio's, when he sits and stares, and says nothing. It is not pleasant."

The girl gave a little shudder, and then went on speaking again, with that peculiarly distinct and clear-cut utterance.

"I wish mamma would go back to England. She says it is too expensive, and that the climate does not suit her. But I want to see it. English girls have so much more liberty; they have so many amusements. I should like England."

Colonel Enderby stopped. This struck him as rather a happy idea. Jessie stopped too, and turned to him. They were standing beneath one of the crooked dwarfed

fir trees bordering the carriage-road, about halfway down to the iron gates.

“Ah! you want to go to England?” he said briefly.

“Yes; I want immensely to go. We could settle down and really know people. Here everybody whom we know goes away, sooner or later. Only Bertie, and Mamma, and I remain.”

“You want me to ask Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay to take you home to England?” said Philip.

“Ah, do, do!” cried the girl, softly, but fervently.

She clasped her pretty white hands in an imploring manner, while her long cloak, flying back in a sudden gust of wind, revealed her slim, graceful figure. Colonel Enderby’s heart warmed sensibly towards this charming young lady. She confided in him with such engaging frankness. He felt more at home with her too, out of doors in the gloom and wet, than in the lofty rooms and amid the faded elegancies of the little red villa.

“I’ll talk to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay,” he said, after a moment’s reflection. “I believe

it would be an excellent plan. I dare say I could be of some use to you—find you rooms, you know, and that sort of thing. Then you might have a couple of months in London during the season, and come down into Midlandshire afterwards. Your father,” he added gently, “was a Midlandshire man; you would like to see his county, wouldn’t you?”

Whether it was the prospect of seeing poor Beau Pierce-Dawnay’s native county, or whether other and less retrospective enjoyments floated before Jessie’s eyes, I cannot say; but she certainly smiled upon her companion with a brilliant and delighted smile.

“Ah! I knew you would help me,” she said.

“Meanwhile,” Philip went on, “we must try to make things a little more cheerful for you here. Let me see, to-day’s Thursday. Suppose you and Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay come and dine with me at the Grand Hotel on Saturday, if it’s fine? There’s a very nice restaurant opening out into the garden, you know. It wouldn’t be

exciting exactly, but it would be a little change."

"It would be delightful," answered Jessie. "I like going out. I like a restaurant. I like the lights, and the people moving about, and the little tables, and the tinkle of the glasses and things."

Philip smiled. It touched him, somehow. There was a wonderful freshness and response in this young nature.

"You have a great faculty for enjoyment," he said, with a certain tone of regret in his voice.

By contrast he felt very old at that moment. The Colonel, who so far had accepted his increasing years with praiseworthy indifference and resignation, was dimly conscious of entertaining a deepening grudge against them.

"The rain is coming on again," he continued, after a minute's silence. "We'd better walk back to the villa—I mustn't let you get wet."

"One moment," cried the girl. "About England—you must be a little careful how you approach mamma. She may not like

it. You need not say that the suggestion came originally from me, need you?"

Undoubtedly, Jessie was very engaging just then. Her innocent flower of a face upturned, her sweet round mouth a little open, her whole attitude questioning and eager.

"You want very much to go?" asked the Colonel. He watched the girl keenly.

"Yes, yes, dreadfully," she replied.

"Very well; I will do my best. I will be a model of discretion. But now we must turn back; the rain 'll be down on us in five minutes."

"Jessie, Jessie! where have you been?" cried Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, as her step-daughter entered the chilly hall of the Villa Mortelli some ten minutes later. "We have been greatly alarmed about you. Antonio and Parker have been searching for you high and low."

In point of fact, the whole of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's household were gathered together in the hall:—Antonio, in his embroidered smoking-cap and gold-rimmed spectacles; Parker, upright and severe; Marie, the waiting-maid, with her square Swiss figure

and high cheek-bones ; Miss Keat, her mild, frog-like countenance and pale, protuberant eyes still bearing testimony to the tears shed over her packing, and her grey alpaca gown having a limpness of outline about it wholly consonant with a depressed mental attitude. Bertie Ames was standing near his handsome cousin, a rather inscrutable expression in his face. And, finally, Malvolio—clothed in a little red jacket, with a big frill round the neck of it, his long brown arms showing particularly lean and skinny out of the short open sleeves—filled, apparently, with an unwonted spirit of revelry, performed a series of wild and impish gymnastics about the shining marble balusters of the staircase in the background.

“ We have been alarmed about you, Jessie,” repeated Eleanor. “ Nobody knew you had gone out. I have been very much agitated.”

The girl pushed back the dark hood from her bright hair ; her eyes were dancing ; the moist air and exercise had deepened the delicate pink in her cheeks. There was a dainty air of defiance about her, a sudden

assertion of personal liberty, as she stood in the middle of the inquiring group.

"I was quite safe," she said, clearly. "Colonel Enderby has been good enough to relieve the tedium of a very dull day by taking me for a walk."

"Oh, really!" murmured Mr. Ames, under his breath.

"You should have left word, Jessie, and saved us this anxiety," said her step-mother; but she spoke less urgently than at first.

That excellent woman, Parker, with many dismal observations regarding the dire consequences of wet boots, drove, without more ado, the young lady upstairs in front of her. Miss Keat's short round person disappeared too, presumably in the direction of her half-filled trunks.

Philip waited only a few minutes. He excused himself, and started back through the now pouring rain for the town. Decidedly there was something unpleasantly mysterious about the atmosphere of the Villa Mortelli: and yet, on the whole, he was glad that Mr. Drake had started alone that morning for Spezia.

CHAPTER VI.

A SEARCH FOR A VOCATION.

IN England it is, of course, an acknowledged fact that marriages are made in heaven. In other countries—as Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay had occasion to point out to Colonel Enderby—they are chiefly made by the parents and guardians of the contracting parties. This, on the face of it, would not seem to be an unreasonable custom; but—in theory, anyway—British sentiment revolts against it.

British sentiment is a very remarkable and curious thing. It is worth thinking about; worth thinking about for the same reason that the origin of matter, and the origin of evil—I do not wish to bracket the two together in thought, only in speech—let us, by all means, avoid the heresy of the

Manichees!—and the origin of life, and a good many other profound subjects are worth thinking about, namely, because they are incomprehensible. British sentiment is entirely incomprehensible. It has a fine disregard both for logic and for experience. If carefully considered, it may generally be found to embody an impressive and apparently successful denial of the axiom that it is impossible at one and the same time to serve both God and mammon. And out of this statement there grows a second thought—a gently entertaining one to the social historian, whose business it fortunately is, not to teach zealously, but to observe faithfully, and then set down his observations. With what vigour and dignified alacrity the respectable Englishman entrenches himself behind his open Bible, and flings a text—almost any one will do—in your inquiring face; and with what consistent and high-handed indifference he treats the practical application of the majority of scriptural injunctions in daily life. If closely examined, the attitude of the said respectable Englishman presents a matter for sincere tears, or

equally sincere laughter, as you regard it from the ideal or the realistic standpoint. We do not pretend to deal in the ideal, and therefore may permit ourselves a comfortable little chuckle.

But to return to the text. English marriages are made in heaven—which, being interpreted, means that the ordinary Anglo-Saxon is a very quiet and domestic sort of animal, who requires a wife. Having, however, at the same time, a curious necessity for the backing up of his own inclination with not only the Divine sanction, but with a warm and overflowing Divine approval, he has exalted marriage to the very highest place in the catalogue of good works, and has indeed made a virtue of necessity with a vengeance. British sentiment has come in, too, in all the force of its corporate strength, and has positively inundated us with admirable views on this subject, concerning which it has evolved a whole literature of fiction and biography. Far be it from me to speak lightly of that literature. It commands my highest respect; it is excellent;

it is salutary; but it is also slightly in-artistic, and may be briefly described as the apotheosis of suburban villas, solid worth, and side-whiskers.

If, in that humble, teachable, scientific spirit in which the social historian seeks to approach all phenomena and all questions presented to him—desiring always and only more clear understanding and fuller light—if, I say, he ventures to ask mildly:—And what about those marriages which expose the deplorable category of their conjugal infelicities to public scrutiny in the Divorce Court; or those other still sadder marriages, that end amid brutal words, and yet more brutal actions; or, again, those other marriages which drag on with distaste and recriminations, or, at best, dull paralyzing indifference and coldness, through long, weary years—are all these made in heaven? British sentiment, backed by British respectability, begs the inquirer, first of all, “not to be coarse;” and then goes on to inform him that these are not true marriages at all—“the people never really loved one another!” Well, that, of course, would

be a most consolatory explanation of distressing phenomena, if one could accept it. Only, unluckily, observation and experience do not bear it out very fully.

For, alas ! love—the love that leads to marriage—whether that marriage prove a very crown of life, or a gateway opening into regions most distinctly purgatorial—would hardly seem to be pre-ordained and predestinate, let down bodily from above. Experience rarely justifies these exalted notions of supreme destiny or of diligent arrangement on the part of the Higher Powers. In nine cases out of ten, that love is more the result of propinquity than of predestination. No celestial architect is required to raise for Love a fair and fateful dwelling-place, let British sentiment, arm-in-arm with British respectability, frown and thunder as they may. The house of Love may be builded easily enough by any man and woman, out of such commonplace materials as a dance, or a song, a light laugh, a lingering pressure of hands, or those meaningless tears that come so easily into a young girl's eyes.

Love would seem to be very humble-minded. He bids no heralds and ambassadors go before him, with blare of trumpets and waving of banners. He comes at haphazard along quiet country lanes, among gleams of moonlight over dewy lawns; he meets us on the crowded city crossing, amid the shouts of the drivers, and under the very feet of the omnibus horses; he has even taken to travelling in prosaic railway carriages in these latter days, and that with a disregard of class almost painfully democratic. He is quick, and subtle, and fearless; yet he comes softly and silently, stealing up without observation. And at first we laugh at his pretty face, which is the face of a merry, earthly child; but his hands, when we take them, grasp like hands of iron, and his strength is as the strength of a giant, and his heart is as the heart of a tyrant. And he gives us to drink of a cup in which sweet is mingled with bitter; and the sweet, too often, is soon forgotten, while the taste of the bitter remains. And we hardly know whether to bless him or curse him, for he has changed

all things; and we cannot tell whether to weep for the old world we have lost, or shout for joy at the new world we have found. Such is love for the great majority; a matter terrestrial rather than celestial, and of doubtful happiness after all.

But it is high time to leave these easily enunciated generalities, and return to Eleanor Pierce-Dawnay, whose communications had produced anything but an agreeable impression upon the mind of our friend the Colonel.

Eleanor, notwithstanding many faults and shortcomings, was a woman of a large and generous nature. She was clever; but clever rather through instinctive sympathy and emotion than through force of intellect. She could boast no general scheme of philosophy, with its careful balancing of evil against good and good against evil. A calm and widely comprehensive view was almost impossible to her. It was not the least comfort to her to trace the logical sequence of events; nor could she lose her inherent horror of individual suffering in a quiet scientific appreciation of the orderly de-

velopment of the law of cause and effect. She did not care a fig about necessary consequences; but she cared deeply that a man or woman—specially, perhaps, the former—should be in pain or sorrow or want. She had a native impulsion, of which, possibly, she was a trifle proud, to dry tears, bind up broken hearts, and administer almost dangerously strong doses of pity and consolation. Such a woman is for ever flinging herself *à corps perdu* into situations of which, when the first excitement of her feeling has worn off, she is liable to get a little tired. Relations with her are likely to be stormy. You had better make hay while the sun does shine, and keep constantly in mind the fact that it is certain not to shine very continuously.

As quite a girl, handsome, ardent, and romantic, Eleanor Ames had, for good or evil, met with Beaumont Pierce-Dawnay.

A tall, fair-haired young soldier, in bitter grief for the death of his pretty young wife, with a broad band of crape round his arm, and a lovely little motherless child by his side, is, undoubtedly, an object calculated

to awaken a warm thrill of commiseration in every female heart. Eleanor forgot those other gentlemen of her acquaintance upon whom she had been wont to expend a certain amount of thought and consideration. Marriage with a bachelor seemed to her a very insipid affair. The ideal office of a woman was that of consoler; the ideal condition that of motherhood—even of step-motherhood, if necessary. Eleanor consoled the young soldier to such good purpose, that in three months from the date of their first meeting he had married her.

I do not pretend to offer any theory regarding the origin of this marriage, and pronounce it heavenly or anything else. My business is merely, in a faithful and diligent manner, to record facts. Beau Pierce-Dawnay was a great, simple, good-natured gentleman, who, when the halo of romance which surrounded him in his character of broken-hearted widower had faded and he was looked at in the light of common day, presented no very wonderful or mysteriously affecting characteristics.

Eleanor wanted an office. She wanted to go on consoling ; but, unfortunately, Captain Pierce-Dawnay did not now stand in the slightest need of consolation. He pronounced himself to be "as jolly as a sand-boy," and was immensely bewildered when he made out that his beautiful wife was not at all pleased at the announcement. At last, still both devoted and bewildered, poor Beau was ordered out to India, and Eleanor took to wandering. She had been a good deal in Italy before her marriage, and the fascination of that strangely absorbing country drew her back to it again. After her husband's death she stayed on. England had become distasteful to her. She had a craving for the sunshine, the flowers, the rich emotions, the glamour and endless suggestion of southern life.

An ardent and sympathetic woman, with no duties dependent on her position to regulate her action and satisfy her imagination, is apt to run a little wild. Eleanor had many hobbies. She could not be accused of riding them to death ; because, before the poor things had arrived at a fatal

stage of exhaustion, she got tired of each one of them in turn, and cantered hopefully away on some fresh steed. Schemes of emigration, the down-trodden condition of the Italian peasantry, the emancipation of woman, all engaged her attention in turn. One year she was distracted about the sufferings of animals, and made herself sick with horror over the revolting details of scientific cruelties. Later, under the influence of some of those devout and somewhat damnatory British Christians who yearly haunt the shores of the Mediterranean during the winter months, she grew anxious as to the future of her soul. She went to prayer-meetings held in the disused ballrooms of large hotels; she read trying little books by obscure authors, bound in the crudest, most uncultivated of colours, on instantaneous answer to prayer, and so forth; she subscribed largely to societies for the wholesale conversion of German Jews, and other equally practical objects.

But Eleanor's sympathies were really too wide and deep to flow long within the artificial barriers of any one sect or system.

Nothing but a general reconstruction of society, whereby sorrow and crying and pain would be for ever abolished, and a universal panacea applied to this poor world's creaking joints, half-blind eyes, and open sores, could pacify the passion of pity which was growing within her. She began to consort with rather dangerous company. Persons fluent of speech, and generous of subversive ideas, began to haunt her little *appartement* in Florence, and keep up loud and enthusiastic discussions till the small hours of the morning. When a woman takes to revolutionary politics, be it in ever so mild a form, she is indeed skating on very thin ice. A convent, a lunatic asylum, or a husband—either will do ; perhaps, even, rightly considered, there is a certain affinity between the three—becomes imperatively necessary.

Just at this critical period of her career, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay happened to meet her cousin, Bertie Ames, at the Baths of Lucca, where she was spending part of the summer. She had not seen much of him for a considerable length of time. The two had

certainly cherished a species of fondness for one another long ago ; but Bertie Ames, in those days, had been a young man with the world too much at his feet to make many claims upon his cousin's pity. She had enjoyed dancing with him, flirting with him, and so on, well enough ; but he had not entered into the serious business of her affections. She had only regarded him as an agreeable and decorative sort of superfluity.

But at the Baths of Lucca, in 1874, Mr. Ames presented a very different spectacle to his charming and warm-hearted cousin. He was just recovering from a serious illness. He was weak and depressed, miserable both in mind and body. His large brown eyes had a look of sadness in them which went straight to Eleanor's heart. An old man-servant of his father's, Antonio by name, and an ill-favoured little monkey appeared to be his only companions. He appealed to Eleanor's imagination, first as a specimen of suffering humanity, and then as a relative. Family affection has a habit of asserting itself with remarkable

vigour in the heart of a woman, when the object of that feeling is an attractive man.

Eleanor resisted neither family affection nor the moan of suffering humanity. She devoted herself to Mr. Ames, and he repaid her with sincere gratitude. He went further. He confided in her; he told her the details of that history which, two years later, she briefly recounted, as has already been stated, to Colonel Enderby. Eleanor entered with generous warmth of feeling into the situation. She erected poor, not very admirable Bertie into a hero. She gloried in his devotion to the ashes of an expiring passion. She lavished upon him both her time and her imagination. She realized his sufferings even more keenly, possibly, than he realized them himself.

To do Mr. Ames justice, he was profoundly touched by her kindness. He possessed in a high degree that lively sense of, and interest in, the society of women, which is undeniably more completely developed in the Latin than in the Teutonic races. To members of the former, a woman always has a peculiar and exciting interest. She is

never taken quite for granted, and reckoned—as Jack Enderby, for instance, reckoned his wife—as a capital good fellow and ordinary companion in arms. We Teutons are very decent, and a trifle suspicious too. Bertie Ames was only half a Teuton, and he put a very high value on the enjoyment of his cousin's presence and ministrations.

When the time came for Eleanor to leave the Baths of Lucca, she found herself singularly unwilling to leave Mr. Ames as well. Quite a moving little scene took place, during which a number of excellent things were said about friendship, and the delightful relation of brother and sister. The end of it all was that Bertie, Antonio, and the monkey travelled back with Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, Jessie, Miss Keat, and that estimable woman, Parker, to Florence.

Some persons advised themselves to be a good deal scandalized at this last eccentricity of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's; but the majority of her acquaintance, knowing her real goodness of heart, and bearing in mind the excellent reputation which, though a young and pretty woman, and her own

mistress for so many years, she had always enjoyed—the majority, I say, contented themselves with smiling, shrugging their shoulders, and observing that the charming widow had exchanged a general scheme of benevolence for a particular one.

Still it must be owned that a decided change came over her way of living. The promoters of Jewish conversion found their attentions quite at a discount; neither encouragement nor subscriptions were any longer forthcoming. Eleanor began to go out a good deal into society instead of entertaining the reformers of society at her own house. These latter gentlemen made a valiant attempt to regain their former position with her. They hinted broadly at the moral danger consequent on putting the hand to the plough and afterwards looking back—looking back, too, in the direction of a specimen of that most noxious class of mankind which eats its bread in idleness, and hugs the aristocratic idea. They denounced Mr. Ames as a viper, a scorpion, a hateful parasite on the wounded and shuddering body of corporate humanity.

To all of which rather violent language Bertie replied by saying in his softest tones, one evening, to his hostess—

“Dear Cousin Nell, I think you mustn’t let those amiable maniacs come here any more. They are, no doubt, immensely amusing; but you may have a little too much to pay in the end for that style of comedy. We must regulate our entertainments, more or less, by the length of our purses, you know.”

It must be admitted that, with all their many virtues, women have not nearly so innate a sense of the lesser dignities of living as men. They cannot—perhaps owing to want of physical strength—pay as much attention to that outward ritual which makes life proceed, even in private, with self-respect and punctuality. An establishment in which there is no man is liable to be uncertain as to hours, messy as to meals, unmethodical in many ways, and even occasionally—though one mentions it with fear and trembling—hardly as careful of cleanliness as it might be. Those wonderful women of the future, the result of several

generations of high school and university culture, who are going to improve us vastly in so many ways, may possibly add masculine appreciation of small dignities and privacies to their other excellences; may have learnt to prefer butcher's meat to miscellaneous editions of tea and toast at odd hours, and to regard morning wrappers as part of the livery of that slavery from which they fondly believe they have escaped for ever. But, meanwhile, there is no denying that a household gains perceptibly in good tone and outward regularity from the moment a man becomes a member of it. Women are for ever making short cuts to comfort; a man, on the other hand, walks straight along the high-road towards that desirable object, and, I venture to think, generally succeeds in reaching it the first.

The complexion of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's little establishment improved very much from the time Mr. Ames, Antonio, and the monkey became recognized members of it. Bertie, who had inherited considerable business capacity from his English father, as well as considerable emotional

capacity from his Italian mother, took his cousin's financial affairs in hand, and set them on a more secure basis than they had been on for a long while. It may be added that he had an excellent taste for the decorative side of life generally, and continued to create a very graceful *entourage* for himself and his relations.

Jessie at this time was just eighteen, and was to come out, as the phrase is, that winter. In point of fact, she came out very effectually. Bertie Ames forgot some of his private griefs in watching the girl's brilliant enjoyment of society ; while Eleanor threw herself, with all her accustomed ardour, into the situation. Jessie proved, undoubtedly, a success ; and her step-mother was honestly delighted at that fact—all the more so, probably, because her relations with the girl had not been entirely satisfactory in the past.

Owing to her sundry and manifold schemes for the temporal and spiritual welfare of mankind, Eleanor's interest in her step-daughter had been spasmodic in character. If Jessie was ill, then she gathered her

into the arms of affection, and lavished tendernesses upon her. But Jessie was very rarely ill. She grew up as some fair, healthy plant grows up in a fertile soil, strong and straight. She made few demands upon the sympathy of others; there was a refined vigour about her, and a happy immunity from those nervous affections which so often beset growing girls.

Eleanor had elaborate theories regarding education, drawn alternately from Rousseau's "Emile," Richter's "Levana," and from the axioms of the last Woman's Rights prophetess she happened to have come in contact with. Practically Jessie held to the teaching of Jean Jacques, though innocent of any acquaintance with the writings of that much-abused philosopher, and followed where Nature led her. She had a remarkable aptitude both for music and languages, though the theory of the one and the grammar of the other meant little enough to her. Her talent was essentially practical and verbal, a desire for something articulate and rapidly expressive.

For her step-mother's hobbies she had but

small comprehension, and an equally limited interest. Jessie from a child had possessed a great capacity for being bored if people became earnest or imperative. She would just go away and leave them. It is to be feared that her sense of obligation to the needs and claims of her fellow-creatures was not very lively. She loved sunshine, movement, exercise, and all natural objects ; she established relations with all manner of living creatures—was friendly with gold-fish, and intimate with cats and canaries. When poor Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, becoming troubled—under the auspices of her revivalist friends—about the condition of her own soul, extended her solicitude to Jessie's soul also, the girl met her anxious and penetrating words first with amusement, and then with something very like anger. For, indeed, in the fulness of her youthful vitality and the keenness of her powers of enjoyment, Jessie had about as much conception of the deeper needs of the human spirit as a butterfly, hawking on a gay summer's day over a bank of honeysuckle and wild roses, might be expected to have.

She declined to take the slightest interest in the emancipation of her sex, being, as she said, quite unconscious of being enslaved; the Italian peasants contrived to wear charming dresses, even though they might be supposed by imaginative persons to be short of some other necessities of life; as to the German Jews, they were extremely ugly, and, as she added, with an irresistible wrinkling up of her pretty little nose, they also usually smelt.

Poor Eleanor's enthusiasms were met by this radiant creature with calm common sense. There was something curiously baffling to her in her step-daughter's personality. Sometimes the elder woman, whose ardent nature demanded warm affection and intimate intercourse, would exercise all her power to fascinate the girl. Then Jessie would smile in her brilliant way, and say, "Ah! now, little Mamma, now you are adorable."—But when her step-mother went on to entreat for more love, a fuller measure of trust and sympathy, Jessie became bewildered, even cross, and would retire gracefully, but firmly, to the less exacting society

of her gold-fish or canaries. And Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay turned away, sighing rather bitterly, to throw herself—metaphorically speaking, of course—into the arms of the socialists, or anti-vivisectionists, or any other misery-mongers who happened to be handy at the moment. Step-mothers, poor things, have established a very unenviable reputation in literature. In real life, it may be questioned whether they are not frequently more sinned against than sinning.

Jessie spent two very gay winters in Florence. She was admired, *fêted*, petted. The young lady had more than one admirer whose attentions were weighted with serious intentions; but the girl herself had an inclination to be slightly annoyed with admiration when it put on an importunate complexion. She was as spontaneously merry as a kitten, and as untroubled by sentimental perturbations.

Eleanor's humour, meanwhile, had changed notably during these two years. Her mind had been invaded by a new idea, which came to possess it with perilous completeness and intensity. She wearied of Florence;

she began to long for solitude, for silence, for an immunity from the distractions of society. Bertie Ames had friends in Genoa, and so it fell out that, in the autumn of 1876, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's rather miscellaneous *ménage* removed itself to the comparative retirement of the little red villa.

BOOK THIRD.

LOVER AND MISTRESS.

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CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH PHILIP MAKES AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

It is surprising how soon you may acquire a habit, and how soon that habit will come to fit you as easily and comfortably as an old glove. If Colonel Enderby had been told, on his first arrival at the Villa Mortelli, that he would walk up there every day for the best part of the coming fortnight, and that each recurring visit would prove less irksome to him than the last, he would have refused to credit the statement. And yet, in truth, he was becoming more than tolerant of that diurnal pilgrimage. I am afraid the Colonel can hardly be acquitted of a charge of procrastination just at this period. Every day he started with an intention of speaking frankly to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay

about the advisability of a return, for a time, at least, to England; every day he went back to his hotel at night without having delivered his piece of advice. It was difficult somehow. There never seemed to be a good opening, or happy opportunity. Eleanor did not invite her guest to participate in any more private interviews. She avoided all personal and intimate communications, and contented herself with being agreeable on broad general grounds. She was a clever woman, with a considerable habit of society, and she really was very pleasant to Colonel Enderby; but she took care not to find herself alone with him. Jessie or Mr. Ames was always present.

The little dinner at the restaurant passed off excellently; and, as now the spring days were bright and long, Eleanor pronounced this a capital opportunity for seeing something of the country around Terzia. She planned long drives to distant villages on the coast,—charming, little, old-world places, with tall, discoloured houses facing the purple sea; where dark-eyed girls and

women—whose pale cotton garments, innocent of starch, present a softness of outline and exquisite delicacy of tone, yellow, pink, or purple, not unworthy of some classic picture—stand in long lines hauling in the seine-nets upon the shelving beach, or lay their week's washing out to bleach on the rough, grey shingle.

The Corniche road leaves the low shoreline sometimes here, and diverges inland among the wooded valleys where the nightingales sing, passing by deep rocky water-courses, where the narcissus, with its fragrant flowers and sheaf of sword-shaped leaves, grows down at the stream-side; by orchards, where fruit-trees are all white and pink with innumerable blossoms, and, in the cool grass beneath them fresh with the winter rains, the fat velvety brown blossoms of the bee-orchis show dark against the full rich green. And to all these scenes Jessie Pierce-Dawnay's bright presence lent an indefinable charm. The girl was so frankly and fearlessly glad.

A certain glamour was coming over Philip Enderby's spirit. He was in no

haste to urge the return to England. Spezia had faded into the far distance. Poor Mr. Drake might continue his little tour alone. The Colonel was growing curiously reconciled to this idle manner of life. He was very well contented, especially when Mr. Ames—to whom in private he occasionally applied not very flattering epithets—and his monkey were out of the way. He began to have some warmer feeling than mere toleration for those large, faded, shady rooms at the Villa Mortelli. He was, in fact, insensibly collecting a gallery of pleasing mental pictures, in every one of which the central figure was that of a fair girl,—leaning back in a carriage, her hands full of flowers, while the fresh sea-wind ruffled her hair; loitering in the sunny terrace under the shade of a red umbrella; wandering among the tangled luxuriance of the neglected garden; sitting and playing brilliant vivid music at the piano, in a dusky corner of the large drawing-room; now and then a trifle tired or pensive, asking some small service which it was a tender privilege to render her.

Ah! really Colonel Enderby was very well entertained just now. He did not analyze the situation, but he most distinctly appreciated it.

On the second Sunday of his stay at Terzia, it happened that he did not make his way up to the villa till quite late. Several things detained him, and combined to induce in him a humour not completely in sympathy with the atmosphere of that peculiarly constituted establishment.

In the morning Philip fulfilled the whole duty of man by attending the English service, held in one of the back rooms of the hotel. There are three separate things which the British tourist demands, and woe to the hotel which does not hasten to supply them—no respectable Anglo-Saxon boot-sole will ever cross its threshold! Two of these things are for the body; the third is for the soul—a proportion not without meaning, perhaps. The British tourist must be accommodated with sponge-baths, open fireplaces,—and an English chaplain. The hotel-manager at Terzia had early realized the existence of this trinity of

necessities on the part of his clients, and had done his best to meet them.

Mr. Drake's acquaintance, the little, ferret-faced clergyman, officiated; while his attendant ladies—the good man, being apparently desirous of making the most of the apostolic permission, was “leading about” a wife, a sister, and two sisters-in-law—with laudable zeal, undertook, supported by an antiquated and tinny piano, to supply the musical portion of the performance. The sermon—that unfortunately inevitable incident in the Anglican church service—consisted of an extempore address on Belshazzar's feast. The subject is sufficiently full of impressive, if mysterious, suggestion in the original narrative. Unluckily, the preacher elected to treat it from a symbolic point of view. Everything was diligently explained to mean something else; and in proportion as his grammar became more doubtful and his types more obscure, the worthy little man's voice waxed louder and louder, and his aspect became more combative and defiant. At length he absolutely bellowed

forth a string of formless sentences, mainly suggestive of an exegetical and doctrinal chaos. One is bound to suppose there is something singularly grateful to the professional palate in this style of discourse, since one is so frequently fated to hear it. To the unsophisticated layman, it is slightly bewildering, and offers but doubtful help towards the conduct of life, or the understanding of matters eternal.

Philip, being but a simple-minded person, did not derive any sensible measure of illumination from the latter part of the exercises of the morning. In the afternoon he went for a walk among the hills. The day was radiant, the air quick with the breath of the sea-breeze.

Turning off the main road, at the outskirts of the town, he passed up the steep paved way between the vineyard walls, to a little village church, with a tall red and yellow painted campanile, standing on the hillside about a mile from Terzia. It was the hour for afternoon service. The bells jangled, harsh and imperative, in the high tower; while on the low wall fronting

the flat space before the church door, men and lads sat lazily chatting and laughing. The village priest—a kindly bright-eyed man, in a worn cassock and rusty skull-cap—wandered, his hands clasped behind him and his tall lean figure somewhat bent, from group to group, speaking a word to one and another with genial familiarity.

Inside the church, dim with the coloured gloom of stained windows and frescoed walls, a large company of peasant women sat or knelt, the gay silk handkerchiefs tied over their heads making them look like a great bed of gaudy spring tulips. The air was warm and heavy with a lingering odour of incense; there was a suppressed murmur of voices, stir of footsteps, and rustle of garments.

In his character of English traveller, Philip felt he had a right to look at anything that presented itself. He stepped within the open church door; but, I grieve to say, there were certain uncultivated and Protestant tendencies in his spiritual constitution which prevented his being

in very warm sympathy with the scene. He loved out-of-doors; and Catholicism, with all its splendour and wide appeal to the imagination, has little enough of out-of-doors about it. It lets in the sunshine through cunningly painted glass, on which it has portrayed the orthodox conception of the ends and aims of mortal existence. Our friend the Colonel was tempted to fancy the white light of truth painfully obscured by passing through this coloured medium.

Be that as it may, he had soon seen as much as he cared to see of the village church. He turned up a narrow path at the back of it, and, after passing through the belt of olive trees—whose tremulous silvery shade is not so much shade, after all, as broken light—through thickets of myrtle and tall Mediterranean heath, on the straight spires of which the withered blossoms showed golden brown, he reached the outer edge of the pine woods high on the mountain-side.

Far below lay the vineyards and gardens, and the houses of the town glittering in

the keen dazzling light. Beyond, the sea stretched away to the southern horizon. The bells of the little village church clanged out wildly for a few minutes more, and then, with a final crash and bang, ceased suddenly. No sound broke the silence save the whisper of the wind in the pine trees, rising and falling in a soft and rhythmic cadence, like that of summer waves on a quiet sandy shore. A glad repose, a sabbath stillness, came over the beautiful land.

Philip Enderby threw himself at full length on the deep brown bed of fallen pine-needles; and as he lay there in the warm sunshine, looking up at the red-barked branches, and dark glossy foliage of the trees outlined clear and sharp against the deep blue-purple of the sky, pleasant thoughts and hopes came to him. Formless hopes that he could hardly have set out in words, yet which brought to his soul deeper meaning than all the ungainly profundity of the sermon he had listened to that morning, and a larger peace and promise than that imaged forth in the

rich gloom of the church, with its half-seen pictures and banners, down below.

Yes, let excited philanthropists, and humanitarian ecclesiastics, and other energetic, improving, and actively virtuous persons say what they may,—it is very good at times to get away into silence and solitude. To get away from all the noise and struggle of man, with his arts and sciences and magnificent schemes, so often abortive, and his poor little space of anxious, self-conscious years, and his mixed motives and feverish efforts. To get away beyond all histories, with their sounds of wailing and battle, their stains of sin and of blood; beyond all the philosophies, with their vain attempts to square the circle and reconcile that which can never be reconciled; beyond all the formulas and all the creeds, with their bitter hatreds, their arbitrary assertions and negations; beyond, yes, beyond the very sense of right and wrong itself, back, back to the great serene heart of Nature—a heart beating with primal and exhaustless energy, yet calm and restrained; filled with the rapture and repose of limitless power and

victorious attainment. It is good to get back and lie on the warm bosom of the eternal mother, the folds of whose garments are the high mountains, whose feet are set in the laughing ocean, and whose life is the life of the world ;—to lie there, while the soul slips away from the sense of its own paltry joys and sorrows, from the narrow hopes and fears of the individual lot ; to be made one with the glorious order of created things, the flesh and spirit no longer conscious of weary fightings and divisions ; to dream of the everlasting mysteries of birth and growth, and of the fulness of strength and of the failing of strength, and of decay—and of the mystery of transmuted force, of life again returning out of death, to begin once more the ceaseless round of existence anew ; to dream of the mystery of night and morning, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, rain and shine, while through all the countless ages the Eternal Wisdom and Goodness broods for ever over the broad bright land and sea. “What is man that Thou art mindful of him ?” Get back, back to the mother of all, and

listen, — peradventure she may speak to you.

Philip Enderby, lying there under the pine trees, in the afternoon sunshine, had a perception of unspeakable trust and confidence, of belief in a final reconciliation far away, far off out of mortal sight. For a little space he dimly grasped the strange secret of the Buddhist Nirvana—that state of acquiescent contemplation, passionless and impersonal, without movement, without desire, which, in the estimation of some of the purest spirits, constitutes the highest conception of perfect and enduring bliss.

“Thank God for this beautiful world,” he said to himself quietly and reverently.

The sun was sloping towards the west, and the shadows were growing long, when he rose up at last. Voices of the peasants making their way back from the village church came up on the sea-breeze from the winding paths below. The spell indeed was broken, but the impression it had made remained for a while yet. Philip wandered down towards the vineyards, amazed, filled with a solemn gladness—like a man who

has seen a vision, and spoken, face to face, with the gods.

But alas! these happy moments of clear insight and illumination are but moments after all. The discords of our over-civilized and artificial life soon drown the music of the spheres; the fair face of heaven is too soon obscured again by storms of passion; while jealousy, self-will, hatred, and fear, like evil beasts, root up and trample underfoot the fruitful land. "Man never continueth in one stay"—which is, after all, extremely fortunate for the dramatist and writer of fiction. Let us console ourselves!—for indeed life at this admirably ideal level would interfere fatally with our excellent system of large profits and quick returns.

Colonel Enderby, as he loitered among the olives, thought that perhaps he would not go up to the Villa Mortelli at all that evening. The silent hour on the mountain-side had done much to loosen the chain of habit that was fastening on him. He was aware of a sudden sense of aloofness from the life of the villa—from Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay with her sad secret and dark

beauty; from Bertie Ames, with his soft voice and air of a mild Mephistopheles. He had drunk deep of the cup of nature. He could hardly go straight back and drink their thin *vin ordinaire*, and listen to the social gossip of a lady who was more than half in love with a gentleman of rather shady antecedents; who, on his part, was greatly disposed to adore her stepdaughter. The good Colonel, you see, permitted himself to state the case a trifle coarsely just then, and the contrast it offered to his late emotions was too glaring. He paused, with a slight movement of disgust.

He leaned against the gnarled grey trunk of one of the old olives, and felt for his cigar-case. He had been a good deal moved. A smoke would steady him.

"Decidedly," he muttered, "I am not quite in the humour for those people just now."

Yet in saying this the Colonel was conscious of making a mental reservation. "Those people" did not include Jessie, somehow. He thought, with a sense of relief, of the girl's bright glancing looks

and guileless laughter. She was as fresh and natural, and far from all subtle undercurrent of sinister meaning, as the resinous scent of the pine-trees, or the babble and glitter of the mountain streams.

"She would understand it all well enough," he thought. His clear eyes softened, and he smiled quietly to himself. "She would never strike a false note, or be out of tune with feelings like these."

Colonel Enderby's smile broadened a little. It changed its character from tenderness to amusement.

"I wonder which of my feelings she would be out of tune with, though?" he added. "I am afraid I am beginning to be a little too much aware of that young lady. Is it possible that she is growing dangerous?"

He walked on down the hillside, not looking very carefully where he was going, but following the path mechanically.

"If they do go back to England, half a dozen good-looking young fellows will be over head and ears in love with her in the first month."

It was surprising how vindictive he felt at the thought of those same good-looking young fellows.

“And why the devil shouldn’t they be in love with her? What more reasonable? And what possible concern is it of mine?”

Colonel Enderby stopped short. The vision had faded. He was no longer face to face with the gods. But he was face to face with something which at moments is hardly less overpowering and incomprehensible, perhaps, than the presence of a divinity would be—he was face to face with his own heart. He was conscious of a sharp self-revelation which filled him both with pain and pleasure; with a sense of exultation and yet of irremediable folly.

“I am in love,” he said. “I, at eight and forty:—I, who have never cared for a woman in that way since Cecilia Murray:—I, who reckoned myself as safe as a church; an elderly friend and adviser, interested of course, filled with a sort of fatherly regard—I am in love, in love with a beautiful girl of barely twenty.”

He was aware of strangely conflicting emotions. It is so keenly pleasurable to have stirrings of vivid sensation; to let the imagination dwell on one fair face and form, which seems to gather up in itself lovely promises, unnumbered hopes, the delight of untold possibilities. And when the face and form in question are those of a young girl, innocent, inexperienced, before whom the years stretch out as a land of promise, there is indeed an inexpressible charm in the position! A man longs to write noble poems on the blank pages of the maiden's book of life; to keep it free from all smirch or stain, from all knowledge of sin, and shame, and sorrow. There is a passion of reverence, almost of pity, mingling with the love of an honest man for a pure girl, which makes it the most exquisite, perhaps, of all human sentiments. "He is the first that ever burst into that silent sea:"—and in that thought there is, for certain natures, positive rapture, an aroma fresh as that of mountain flowers, a living delight as in the breath of the wind of morning.

Philip Enderby drew himself up to his full

height. He rejoiced in his fine physical health, in his vigour of body, as he walked rapidly along the steep paved lane between the vineyard walls. He was still in his prime; Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay herself had told him so, and it was true.

But these gracious thoughts did not last long. Wiser and sadder ones followed; practical considerations of disagreeable cogency. Reason critically examined the situation, and, alas! appeared disinclined to strengthen the hands of emotion and desire. Eight and twenty years is a wide interval between the respective ages of wife and husband. Not only is the disparity ungraceful; but Colonel Enderby realized bitterly that it might amount to being actually perilous. He was not a vain man, and was not disposed to over-estimate his own powers of attraction. Then, too, his quick appreciation of what was natural and harmonious influenced him, perhaps, unnecessarily at this juncture. The high value he set on the freshness and spontaneity which were such conspicuous qualities in Jessie, made the idea of her marrying a

man whom it would be absurd to call anything but middle-aged almost distressingly incongruous to him. Philip revolted from anything in human relation which appeared to him distorted, or approaching ever so faintly to what he would have called grotesque.

"A decrepit old man with a beautiful young woman tied to him is a hateful object," he broke out at last. "People sentimentalize over it and call it touching and pathetic. It is disgusting. Do I want to condemn a pretty woman, some fifteen years hence, when she is at her best, to tucking me up in bed of a night, and feeding me with gruel, and helping to wrap shawls round my gouty old feet; and perhaps—there's no saying how low one may fall at last—to walking about by my bath-chair at some beastly watering-place?"

Colonel Enderby shook himself.

"Pah! disgusting!" he said. "No, no; I'm a fool ever to have thought of it. It's all utter folly and madness. Somebody ought to clap me into a lunatic asylum. A

man's not fit to be about loose who is liable to lose his head in this sort of way."

Colonel Enderby dined by himself in the restaurant that evening. He did not feel in the humour to meet the ferret-faced clergyman and his following, and all the other miscellaneous collection of guests, at the *table d'hôte*. He sat alone at a little table, by a large French window standing open on to the hotel garden. There was a sound of many feet in the main street of the town as the dusk closed in. Companies of young men strolled up and down, singing together in full deep voices a wild wailing chant, which seemed to tell of "old unhappy, far-off things, and battles long ago." Then suddenly would come a snatch of violin music, dying away again, as the player passed on between the high painted houses, into silence, with a plaintive lingering cry. The hall porter, his long green coat plentifully decorated with gold lace, slowly lighted the numerous gas-lamps in the square garden; stopping now and again to exchange a word or two with the Colonel's black-headed little waiter,—who

had dawdled out, napkin on arm, to take a survey of things in general between the courses. There was a blending of light, and movement, and rich colour, and light-hearted laughter with those suggestions of age, and weariness, and regret, that are hardly ever absent from Italian scenes. The country is too ancient; it means too much. The life of to-day merely plays like a fitful iridescence on the great stream of memories which sweeps past us with such awful strength and indifference.

Philip had left peace up among the pine woods on the still slopes of the Apennines. Here was man once more, crowding, crushing forward, generation after generation, down the manifold ages of history; the same stories told over and over again, through an endless procession of human lives. The last, the man of to-day, troubled with the same questions, the same maddening desires, the same degrading necessities, and as far away too, apparently, from the heart of absolute truth as the stern dark old Romans of the Republic; or the splendid and licentious Romans of the Empire; or

the savage hordes of barbarian Goths and Franks, and Lombards; or the dim, chivalrous children of the Middle Ages; or the glittering, rapturous sons and daughters of the Renaissance; or the weary watchers for the dawn of returning liberty in the long sad night of Austrian and Papal supremacy.

Colonel Enderby, well dressed, well off, solidly English, sitting comfortably at dinner at the open window of a modern hotel, and looking out calmly into the narrow streets of an unimportant north Italian town, was still haunted and oppressed with a perception of these things. The past seemed to over-shadow and absorb him, threatening to swallow up his individuality. Thousands of men had wandered along the flowery path of love, all unsuspecting, as he had. Thousands of men had staked their life's happiness on a woman's smile, and the clasp of a woman's hand. Thousands had turned away disappointed, sick at heart, consumed with unsatisfied desire. Nay, more, thousands had got all they dreamed of or hoped for, and, in the end thereof,

weariness and sorrow. It was the old, old story over again.

The black-headed waiter, who had found conversation agreeable, rather to the neglect of more obvious duties, hurried in suddenly.

“Would monsieur the colonel have dessert? There was an excellent *compôte* of fruits?”

No, monsieur the colonel would not have dessert. Monsieur the colonel had arrived at conclusions. He went up to his own room and dressed himself for the evening with scrupulous precision. He stopped a moment in the hall on coming down again, and asked the porter for a light for his cigar. The man brought it and then remarked, as he helped Philip on with his overcoat—

“They have company at the Villa Mortelli to-day. Two English ladies, a little boy, and a maid. Antonio, Madame Pierce-Dawnay’s servant—whom, doubtless, monsieur has often seen—has been down to secure rooms for them.”

Colonel Enderby did not bestow much attention upon this announcement; he was

busy with his own thoughts. He was going to tell Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay that, as she had honoured him with her confidence, he would strongly urge upon her the advisability of an immediate journey to England. He was also going to say good-bye. He had settled definitely to go on to Spezia to-morrow.

CHAPTER II.

A SPRING NIGHT.

Good resolutions are a pleasant crop to sow. The seed springs up so readily, the blossoms open so soon and make such a brave show—specially just at first. We are full of self-congratulation ; we point to our patch of garden ground with pardonable pride, and ask if anything ever promised better. But when the time of flowers has passed, what as to the fruit ? Well, it must be admitted that the fruit has a bad habit of maturing but slowly, and that the wind too often brings it down before it is well ripe. Everybody knows what an unsatisfactory thing wind-fallen fruit is. After all the trouble it has given us in the earlier stages of growth, we grudge to let it lie on the ground and rot ; and yet if, in an economi-

cal spirit, we gather it together and eat it, it has an undeniable tendency to prove unwholesome, and produce that inelegant and painful disorder vulgarly known as the colic.

Philip Enderby's good resolutions were in very full bloom as he walked up on that Sunday evening to the little red villa. In saying this the writer does not, for a moment, wish to raise a smile at the Colonel's expense. Far from it. To those who look below the surface and recognize how very seldom men and women do actually sacrifice their own desires to the ruling of an idea, there is something fine in such a man's directness and singleness of purpose; in his voluntary self-abnegation; in his readiness to do violence to his own feelings, if, by the doing of such violence, he can preserve what appears to him an ideal fitness of things. There is a grain of heroism, surely, in an honest acknowledgment of one's own disabilities—a heroism all the more rare of attainment because unsurrounded with romance and glamour, because not in the very least exciting.

Colonel Enderby had determined to stand aside, to efface himself, not so much as to hint at his own feelings. They were strong—strong enough in all conscience, as he owned to himself, almost with shame—but he himself was stronger. He looked the matter fairly in the face, judged it, and turned away. He thought it would be little short of dishonourable to trade upon Jessie's innocence and inexperience, to use his love, still more his age or loneliness, as a claim upon her pity. The Colonel, by the way, accredited Jessie with a number of virtues, of the existence of which her conduct and conversation had given but limited indications. But, then, lovers have a proverbial power of balancing inverted pyramids, going to sea in sieves, and successfully performing other feats of a kindred nature, impossible to a faithless and unbelieving generation.

The girl must go to England, he thought. She was pretty enough and original enough to make a distinguished marriage. She should marry a man, young, brilliant, and hopeful as herself. And when that small

voice, which is not the voice of conscience, but the voice of something quite the reverse of conscience—devout persons have gone so far as to fancy it the voice of Satan himself,—when this voice began to suggest objections, to ask him inconvenient questions—when, for instance, it inquired, “What and if this imaginary brilliant young man turns out a gambler, a profligate, or a drunkard?”—Philip remained firm and clear-sighted. The fate which lay before Jessie in the future, it was no business of his to predict. God knew; and it was not for him, Philip Enderby, to indulge his own passion under the specious pretence of acting special providence to her, and protecting her from possible trouble. His duty was to leave her free; free as the soft breeze of the spring night. To speak his mind fearlessly to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, and then go away and forget—for Philip had no morbid craving to pose, as a man with a history, or to hug a useless regret—that he had ever come near being something more to the captivating young lady than her father’s

old and faithful friend. That was the right course for him to pursue.

As far as his personal appearance went, the Colonel had rarely showed to greater advantage than he did on this occasion. The fighting light had come into his blue eyes, and his jaw was set and square. Strong emotion, in some men, produces a singular effect of youth. It refines and chastens the face. Philip looked some six or eight years under his actual age, as he walked up rapidly through the trellised vines,—whose young leaves, where the waning moonlight touched them, seemed set in a tiny rim of silver.

By following a narrow path across the vineyards you avoid the many zig-zags of the carriage road. This path comes out on the right, at the foot of the terrace on which the house stands ; and, passing along close under the wall of masonry, joins the main road some twenty yards further on, at the bottom of the final ascent.

As Colonel Enderby reached the end of the path and turned along under the wall, he heard voices on the terrace immediately

above him. He could not see the speakers, owing to their position, and the intervening screen of leaves.

"I believe he was always a very well-meaning young man, not good looking, and not very sharp, you know. We saw a great deal of him at one time, more, in fact, than I really wished—not that I want to say a word against him, pray understand that; he was perfectly inoffensive."

Philip received a slight shock. The voice—a woman's—had something alternately aggressive and wheedling in the tones of it, which struck him as unpleasant, yet dimly familiar.

"I think it must be the same," he heard Mr. Ames answer; there was no mistaking his soft utterance. "The description tallies admirably, except in one particular."

"What particular?"—this sharply by the woman.

"He is sometimes a little offensive now, at least to me, dear aunt. But people must develop, you know, in twenty years. He is still not very sharp, as you put it; and he is eminently respectable."

Philip walked on quickly out of hearing. He had an instinct that the foregoing conversation concerned him nearly. Taken all round, it was not a flattering piece of criticism; still, he derived a positive, if unchristian, satisfaction from the knowledge that he was offensive at times to Mr. Ames. But that woman's voice? He could not fit a name or personality to it, yet he became momentarily more and more convinced that he remembered it very well.

He walked fast along the vineyard path, cutting impatiently at the straggling weeds by the side of it as he did so, and then turned to the right up the carriage road. The steep slope of the ground compelled him to slacken his pace.

Frogs were croaking and barking up at the old reservoir, among the tall green canes in the gulley on the left, and the sharp metallic note of the locusts came from the rose bushes; but Colonel Enderby with all his love of nature, was not in the right humour to find pleasure in these things. His pride rebelled against the false

position in which he found himself. The fact of having overheard something not intended for his ears was intensely annoying to him. That woman's voice troubled him. All the uncomfortable side of life at the Villa Mortelli, which had begun to pass out of the range of his vision during the last ten days, rushed into the foreground again, with obtrusive distinctness. The lines of duty and wisdom had showed plain enough when he left Terzia some half-hour ago; but now they seemed to grow confused and blurred. He felt suspicious, vaguely disturbed. This movement of suspicion extended itself even to the beautiful night. The grasshopper became a burden, the frogs with their everlasting clatter an absolute nuisance. The scent of the orange-trees, wafted down on the soft wind from the garden beyond the house, was sickly in its sweetness. There was a magical influence abroad to-night, as baffling and perplexing as the dim sense of familiarity which that woman's voice had evoked.

At the top of the hill Colonel Enderby paused. The scene before him was a

quaint and fantastic one. The usually sober little villa seemed, for once, to have put on a gala dress. The terrace stretched away bathed in pale moonlight, save where a broad shaft of more positive and yellower light streamed out across it from the hall door. The garden was gay with a number of little, coloured, paper lanterns, swaying gently in the breeze, and showing here and there, in high relief, the blossoms and foliage of the adjacent shrubs, with spaces of dusky shadow in between. From the garden came a sound of voices.

But that which specially arrested Colonel Enderby's attention was a pair of white figures on the terrace, directly in front of him—one that of a girl, the other of a child some five or six years old. The two were playing together, running lightly to and fro, laughing and calling to each other in tones fresh and clear as bird-notes. There was a weird unearthly effect in these pale flitting figures. For a few seconds, crossing the shaft of light streaming out from the doorway, they would become materialized, honest flesh and blood; then stepping

back into the moonlight again, they instantly regained a vague ethereal character.

Philip hesitated; he stood still watching them. Under the circumstances, it was difficult to know exactly how to act. He could not bring himself to walk up calmly to the young lady in the midst of her mystic evolutions, and greet her with some stereotyped remark upon the state of the weather. His taste made him recoil instinctively from so very unimaginative a mode of procedure. And there was something more restraining than mere good taste in Philip just now. He was in that heightened state of moral and emotional consciousness, in which conventional ways of conducting one's self are quite the least easy or obvious. Seeing Jessie again in the light of the confession he had so lately made to himself, the poor Colonel was almost painfully aware how much she was to him; how delightful he found her presence; what a tender and yet penetrating value her every look and action had for him; how terribly sweet it would be

to take her in his arms, to hold and keep her for ever next his heart. And yet as she laughed with merry, meaningless laughter, and ran with light quick footsteps after the laughing child, she seemed cruelly beyond his reach, a creature of some young, far-off, ideal world. Yes, love was indeed working. In Philip the dear, tremulous, delicious heartache had fairly begun, and I, for my part, entirely refuse to pity him. The piteous moment only comes, for each one of us, when that happy pain is cured for ever.

Suddenly the child set off running straight along the terrace, looking back, and calling to the girl behind him as he ran. Catching sight unexpectedly of Colonel Enderby's tall dark figure in front of him, the boy swerved with a shrill cry of fright, and would have fallen headlong, if Philip had not stepped forward and caught him by the arm.

"Look out, my little man," he said kindly, "or we shall have you tumbling on your head."

Jessie paused on hearing the child's cry.

She stood still for a moment, and put up one hand, with an instinctive movement to smooth the coils of her fair hair. Then she came forward slowly. The moonlight fell softly upon her straight slender figure. Her head was thrown back, and there was a charming half-defiant smile on her face.

Those desirable blossoms which had shown so thick on Philip's patch of good resolutions wilted and faded curiously at this juncture. The fruit of them, if it ever came to perfection, promised to be a detestably bitter mouthful. He was rapidly passing out of the region in which a man thinks and reasons, into that far more interesting and, also, far more dangerous one in which he merely feels. But he fought gallantly with the rising tide of his own passion. He would go away to-morrow. It would be folly, and more than folly, to ask this mere child to marry him, and yet—yet, how he could have loved her! How gladly he could have consecrated all his life to her service! With what fulness of satisfaction he could have borne her off from this crowded, hot, suggestive Italian land, and

watched her nature unfold its full sweetness through the long, still English summer days, amid the broad green country, and in the innocent northern sunshine! He fancied the girl would be far more at home at dear, stately old Bassett Darcy than in the sultry artificial glamour of the Villa Mortelli.

All this flashed through Philip's mind as Jessie, in flowing white garments, came forward in the cool moonlight. The garden, with its tawdry coloured lanterns, its fitful murmur of conversation, and tinkle of coffee-cups, lay behind her. She was stepping westward, away from it and all that it implied—away from Bertie Ames and his sub-acid humour, away from Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay and her dark restless affection, away from unknown ladies with harsh, half-remembered voices, away from that little haunting evil-spirit of a monkey,—away from all that, out towards the freedom and gracious solemnity of the spring night—and towards him.

Colonel Enderby dropped the boy's hand, which had rested in his. He put the child

gently away from him, and stood waiting. His eyes were very clear and steady; but there was a certain pain in his expression, as of one to whom a good gift is offered, yet who is constrained, for very delight in it, to refuse to put forth his hand and take it.

The little boy, who did not apparently at all relish this indifference on Philip's part to his own small presence, ran up to Jessie, and pulled at her dress, saying—

“Who is he? What does he want? Don't let us stop playing because of him.”

Jessie looked full at the Colonel for a minute, then she bent down towards the upturned face of the child, and said, with her peculiarly clear and detached enunciation—

“Listen, Johnnie, and I will tell you who he is. He is a kind friend, and a famous soldier. He has seen great battles and strange countries. And he never cried when he was a little boy and nearly fell down on the gravel. And,” she went on, very softly, “he promised to help me to get away from the little red villa and go to

England, but I am afraid he has forgotten all about that."

"I don't want you to go away, Jessie," returned the boy, promptly. Evidently he regarded most things from a personal standpoint. "I want you to stay here and play with me."

Colonel Enderby came up and stood near Jessie. Her words had been wonderfully pleasant to him. She rested one hand on the boy's shoulder, and with the other pushed back the heavy mass of brown hair from his forehead, all the while looking up with something between amusement and appeal at the man standing opposite to her.

Philip felt a quickening of the pulse, and a certain intoxication of the senses such as he had not known for many a long day. He would go—yes, he would go ; but still, it was not in human nature to cut short the present moment.

"You still want to get away to England very much, then ?" he asked.

"I don't care so much about it to-night," she answered, still passing her hand over the boy's hair, "because I am amused.

But to-morrow, or the first day it rains, or Bertie is cross, or mamma has a headache, I shall want to go as much as ever."

The tide of feeling was rising, rising in Philip; but he struggled with it manfully.

"I have come to-night on purpose to speak to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay on that subject," he said. "I ought to have done so sooner, but the days have slipped by, and I have had no suitable opportunity. I did not forget, all the same."

Jessie looked down and gently patted the child's shoulder.

"I do not fancy you are one of the people who easily forget their promises, Colonel Enderby. I said so just now; I don't quite know why,—but I do not really think it."

Philip took a long breath. He had some difficulty in replying as calmly and unconcernedly as he wished.

"You mustn't speak to me like that, Miss Pierce-Dawnay," he said. "It makes it rather hard for me to say to you that which I came here to say."

Jessie glanced up quickly and attentively.

"I have come to bid you good-bye," he

went on doggedly. "I am obliged to leave for Spezia to-morrow."

The necessity of that journey to Spezia had become to Philip, in the last few hours, a formula in which he instinctively took refuge. To him the words held a world of meaning over and above the actual statement.

"It is Mr. Drake," cried the girl. Her expression altered curiously. "I don't care for Mr. Drake."

"Poor Drake!" said Philip. "Ah! I'm afraid there is a good deal more in it than can justly be put down to his account."

"But you will come back again?"

Jessie spoke with a most engaging little air of entreaty.

Colonel Enderby shook his head rather sadly.

"No, I think not," he answered.

The girl turned away, almost petulantly. Her soft white skirts swept against Philip as he stood by her, and stirred the loose gravel, as she moved, with a quick rattling sound. She threw herself forward, leaning her elbows on the low terrace wall, and

looked out over the dim vineyards into the deep purple of the night. Her attitude showed very markedly the supple beauty of her figure—the strong delicate line of the back from shoulder to waist, and the graceful curve of her well-set hips under her close-fitting white bodice.

“It is all no use then,” she said. “Mamma will never go to England if you leave her to herself. She will stay, and stay, and stay. I do not know how it is, but I believe when people have been some time in Italy they cannot go away. They are under a spell; they must remain. Mamma is like that. If you leave us we shall stay here always. Don’t go, Colonel Enderby,” she cried, suddenly standing up and turning to him. “Or if you must go, come back soon again. Everything has been so much pleasanter since you came. Mamma has been delightful to me; we have had no little scenes. And as to Bertie’s melancholy, it did not matter; I had some one else to think about.”

Jessie spoke very simply and frankly, looking into her companion’s face. One

thing that helped to make this young lady so truly captivating was an apparent absence of all self-consciousness. There was an effect of straightforwardness in her little speeches which effectually robbed them of coquetry.

As for Philip, he was hard pressed. If there was a strain of egotism in Jessie's regret, he did not very carefully consider it. It was enough that the fair young creature, standing there within a yard of him, begged him not to desert her; told him her days were pleasanter for his coming; trusted him thus in her beautiful and fearless innocence. The moment was a critical one.

Just then, however, the boy, who had assisted very unwillingly at this interview, in which his small personality seemed to count for so little, lost patience altogether, and broke into open remonstrance.

"Come along, Jessie," he said, pulling at her hand. "Let's come and play. Or else take me to mother. I want to go to mother."

Mr. Bertie Ames came out of the garden. He leant against the gate-post for a few

seconds, watching the group at the far end of the terrace, and then sauntered slowly towards them.

"Come along, Jessie, don't you hear? Do come," whined the boy.

The corners of his mouth began to turn down in an ominous fashion.

"Ah! don't cry," she answered quickly. "I do not like children when they cry."

The critical moment was over. Colonel Enderby gathered himself together again. He had been sorely tempted, but he had mastered the temptation. He would be true to the best he could see.

"I will talk to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay," he said to Jessie. "You will trust me to do my best?"

"Oh yes; as to that, I trust you very fully. But, all the same, we shall stay on here indefinitely if you go away."

"I must go away." Philip spoke gently and gravely, looking very full at her. "I must go for a very simple reason—I dare not stay."

CHAPTER III.

THE JOYS OF REUNION.

"MY dear Jessie," Mr. Ames began, languidly, as soon as he was within comfortable speaking distance, "are you disposed to perpetrate an act of virtue, and go and mount guard? Cousin Eleanor is becoming a little nervous; I am quite nervous already. You are eminently welcome, Colonel Enderby," he added, with gracious emphasis. "Some relations of mine have most kindly come to see me to-day. We have not as much in common as one could wish—my fault, of course, I own,—and though family affection goes a long way, and fills up many gaps, conversation now is becoming the least shade difficult. I have been looking forward to

your arrival with longing and hope. Would you come and say something to them? We should all unite in a movement of gratitude unfeigned."

"I shall be very happy to make myself useful," said Philip, stiffly.

He detested Mr. Ames with amazing cordiality at that moment.

"That is so good of you," the other man answered. Then he addressed Jessie, at whom he had glanced more than once while speaking.

"I wonder if you know how extremely becoming that gown is?" he remarked, in a meditative manner.

"It does not much matter whether I know it or not," she replied quickly.

"If other people do, you mean," continued Mr. Ames, still looking at her, and lifting his eyebrows slightly. "Commend me to your fundamental good sense, Jessie. It never deserts you."

"I did not say that," the girl answered, with some warmth.

"Oh no, of course not. If you had, it would have tended to disprove my state-

ment with irritating rapidity. But you leave things to be understood. Your taste is always admirable."

"That is more than can be said of your own, at times, Mr. Ames," broke in the Colonel.

A number of subtle strains of feeling had combined to endanger Philip's self-control. He was bitter, and he lost his temper pretty thoroughly. "That fellow, with his nasty insinuations, will make her as artificial and unbelieving as he is himself," he thought; and then he added, mentally, a certain desire concerning Mr. Ames' future destiny, considerably more vigorous than polite.

Bertie, meanwhile, stared at him with an air of interested surprise.

"Suppose we come into the garden," he said. "Perhaps it would be safer. This spot is exposed; and medical men say that moonlight is dangerous. It affects the intelligence, in some cases. Shall we come?"

Few things are more acutely irritating than that another person should trium-

phantly retain his suavity of demeanour, when you are conscious of having lost your own. Bertie Ames practised this passive form of torture frequently upon the members of his acquaintance. He entirely refused to be ruffled ; he became gentler and more seriously polite and gracious,—that was all. He was perfectly ready to pardon small insolences, and bless those that cursed him ; and this not because his spirit was penetrated with a conviction of the inestimable value of the grace of humility, but simply because it was not worth while to get excited. Men and things were profoundly unsatisfactory ; this world is a most unsuccessful speculation, bound to go wrong and prove a bore. To permit yourself to be excited or angry implied that you had expected things to go right, and were proportionately disappointed. It was crude, it was exquisitely foolish to be disappointed ; and if there was one thing Mr. Ames dreaded it was being foolish. He did not dread anything else very much. He was under the impression that he had taken the

measure of the possible evils which could befall him—he believed he was equal to meeting them. He had not very much, he thought, either to gain or to lose, barring his belief in his own perspicacity. That would be a heavy loss, and an irretrievable one.

As to Colonel Enderby, Bertie had a considerable respect for him. He fancied that he understood the other man's character pretty completely. He knew quite well that Colonel Enderby disliked him; but it would have appeared about as reasonable to Bertie to be annoyed with him on these grounds as to be annoyed with a snail for moving with deliberation, or with a spider for enjoying a diet of flies. People are the result of their circumstances, of inheritance, nationality, education. To be offended with them, poor dears, for what they cannot possibly help, for sympathies and antipathies, none of their choosing and beyond their control, is simply absurd. And so it comes about that a materialist and necessarian creed produces some aspects of the highest Christian endurance and

toleration—a really admirably glad suffering of fools, combined with a beautiful absence of any vindictive desire to bray the said fools in mortars, with the professed intention of grinding the folly out of them.

The immediate consequence of Mr. Ames' philosophy on the present occasion, was that he entertained his companion with agreeable conversation as they walked slowly after Jessie and the little boy down the length of the terrace. His face was mild and serious, his manner calm and soothing. He treated the Colonel as one treats a slightly insane patient, who should be agreed with and humoured. Bertie dawdled, loitered, gazed down over the terrace wall at the vineyards and the town below—did his best, in fact, to lengthen out the little walk as much as possible, and completely to engage Colonel Enderby's attention.

Philip's wrath abated under these blandishments. He thought he had been a trifle rough on Mr. Ames. He did not care to emphasize that movement of roughness. He had plenty on his hands already, with-

out complicating matters by a brush with this imperturbable young gentleman. He dawdled too, and listened very civilly to Mr. Ames' advice as to the best way of seeing Italy, and other kindred matters, while his eyes followed Jessie's retreating figure with lingering wistfulness.

As they went in at the dilapidated gate of the garden Bertie was saying:—

“You should come for a winter, you know. Florence, for instance, is delightful in winter. And there generally is interesting society there; society that presents a good deal of material to the imagination. Yes, you should see it, Colonel Enderby. You would form an element—perhaps a new one. Society would be obliged to you. By the way, my cousin, Mrs. Farrell, who is here to-night, could tell you a lot about Florence. She was there a good deal a few years ago, before her husband, poor Eugene, died. There were original traits in Eugene's character. Mrs. Farrell had some experiences, I fancy, while she lived in Florence.”

Colonel Enderby happened to look full at

Bertie Ames as the latter finished speaking. His thoughts had been engaged with somewhat penetrating personal considerations, and he had hardly noticed what the other man had been saying. The two were standing quite near each other in the narrow gateway. Glancing at him suddenly the Colonel was aware of a singular expression about his companion, of an [intent-ness of gaze, as though he was watching him with some distinct purpose.

Bertie Ames put his hand over his eyes for a moment, with an indolent, half-disgusted gesture.

“Dear me,” he said, “how vulgar those wretched little lanterns look after the moonlight! and yet Jessie and I were rather pleased with our illumination at first. Even now—though I own it is a lamentable exhibition of the intermittent purity of my taste—I think it has a certain value. It presents a contrast, and there is a great deal to be got out of contrasts. They are very teaching. They make one aware of a number of sensations one might otherwise miss. And at my age I begin to cherish

sensations—that is if they are not too vivid.”

He moved on as he spoke into the gleaming garden; and then, smiling amiably at Philip, added—

“Talking of contrasts, Colonel Enderby, here is a sufficiently telling one. It is a little unkind to one of the ladies, certainly, but that, alas! is unavoidable. Just look there, at my cousin Jessie Pierce-Dawnay and my cousin Cecilia Farrell, *née* Murray.”

Colonel Enderby came a few steps into the garden too. He started, and could hardly repress an exclamation. He was conscious of a sudden luminous concussion in his brain. The solid ground seemed to give a lurch, and then slowly settle itself into place again.

Where the four weedy gravel paths met in the centre of the garden, with the light of a row of swaying lanterns falling fully upon her, Jessie stood, her white figure showing in high relief against a dim multitudinous background of leaves and flowers. She was speaking with considerable vivacity

and animation—apparently describing her late game of play. By her side, listening to her clear speech, was a tall, thin, jaded woman, who had undeniably shaken hands with the days of her youth. She wore a plain travelling dress of dark material; and gave the impression of being a tired, careful, over-burdened individual; of having reached a state of mind in which she was indifferent to those small niceties of feminine attire, and was unequal to that prettiness of gesture and manner so important to every woman who retains her natural desire of appearing to advantage in masculine eyes.

As a connecting-link between these two very dissimilar persons stood the little boy—holding the hand of the elder woman, kicking about the gravel with his foot, and putting in a remark from time to time in thin treble tones.

“I hope you have not tired yourself, Jessie,” said Mrs. Farrell, with an even colourless utterance. “You have been very kind in amusing Johnnie so long.”

Jessie laughed gently. She looked won-

derfully sparkling with her fresh face and quick, graceful movements. The emotion she had displayed a short time before, when talking to Colonel Enderby, had apparently passed away, leaving no trace, save perhaps a brighter light in her blue-grey eyes, and a slight vibration in her voice.

"I am hardly ever tired," she answered, "unless I am bored, and then I just go to sleep. Mamma says I am remarkably strong. I am very glad of that. I am not fond of sickness or sick people—it all seems unnatural, you know."

Mrs. Farrell appeared a little bewildered; she drew the boy nearer to her as she replied—

"Sickness may be unnatural. I am sure I don't know. It is very common."

Bertie Ames smiled. He glanced at the two women under the orange trees, and then at Colonel Enderby.

"This contrast interests you?" he inquired.

The Colonel's expression had resolved itself out of simple astonishment into one of considerable resolution. The position was

a painful and embarrassing one, but he was determined to carry it through with a high hand.

“I believe I have the honour of knowing that lady,” he said, with some dignity of manner. “She has probably forgotten me, though, as it is a long while since we met. I must ask you to mention my name to her, to recall me to her remembrance.”

Bertie Ames made a gesture of assent.

“By all means. But here are Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay and my worthy aunt, Mrs. Murray, just coming out of that gnat-infested little arbour. Speak to them first. My cousin is not in her happiest mood to-night, I grieve to say, therefore it is advisable to observe formalities.”

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay did, in fact, sweep up to the two gentlemen in a rather unnecessarily dramatic manner. She shook hands with Philip in silence, and then stepping aside said—

“Colonel Enderby, Mrs. Murray. Mrs. Murray assures me that you and she are old friends. That was the term, wasn’t it?—old friends, Colonel Enderby.”

Philip bowed profoundly to a voluminous figure which blocked the archway of the harbour.

“Ah! perhaps Colonel Enderby won't admit the friendship,” said the lady, with a large and slightly biting archness of address. “We women remember every little event in our quiet monotonous lives; but with you gentlemen it is so different. A thousand things happen to you, you know, and deaden the old recollections, while we poor things sit at home with our fancy-work, and our memories, and our regrets. Ah! dear me.”

Philip felt nettled.

“I too have an excellent memory, I assure you,” he said quietly.

“Eh! what?” exclaimed Mrs. Murray, sharply.

Then she turned to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay with an assumption of great geniality of demeanour.

“We have always watched Colonel Enderby's career with so much interest, you know. The papers have not been silent. They have given us information—

very deeply interesting information at times. I have often said to Cecilia, 'I wonder if we shall ever meet Colonel Enderby again?' And now that it should come about through you, my dear Bertie, in this unexpected way, really, you know, it is very, very singular."

The smile which accompanied these words revealed a remarkably even and glittering set of teeth. Mrs. Murray was an old woman; but she was extremely well preserved, almost too well preserved, perhaps. She was stout, high-coloured, and completely mistress, apparently, both of herself and of the situation.

"My dear aunt, what greater happiness can befall my unworthy self than to give you pleasure? Giving is more blessed than receiving, you know. But in this case the blessing seems to ricochet somehow; and in the giving, I too am sensible of receiving, in a measure."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay looked rather hard at the young man.

"Bertie," she said quickly, "you are talking nonsense. Come," she added,

addressing the Colonel, "come and speak to Mrs. Farrell."

Philip found himself bowing again stiffly—mechanically. He had a vision of a pale, worn, anxious woman's face ; and was aware of a strange tightening sensation about the muscles of his throat as he tried to deliver himself of a civil and appropriate greeting. The last time he had seen this woman she was pretty and young ; he had loved her devotedly ; he had kissed her at parting ! It seemed cruelly malicious on the part of circumstance that he should meet her again on this day of all days in his life, when the cherished sentiment of years had fairly died out into grey ashes, and the clear, intense flame of a growing passion was quickening the deep places of his heart.

For a perceptible space of time after Philip's introduction to Mrs. Farrell there was a silence. No one seemed disposed to take the initiative. Then Mrs. Murray began to repeat, with an air of being quite determined to say something, her former phrases about the lapse of time, the unfailing memory of woman, the interest

excited in her mind by Colonel Enderby's career, and the strange and agreeable chance of this encounter.

"I wonder," remarked Mr. Ames, gently, "how far one really enjoys meeting old friends. Sometimes it strikes me that there is a grain of conventionality in one's expression of satisfaction. I dare say I am peculiar in the matter, but I find the sight of old friends rarely fills me with unmitigated rapture. You are fond of subtleties of this kind, what do you think about it, cousin Nell?"

"Hadn't we better go down to the hotel?" broke in Mrs. Farrell, speaking hurriedly to her mother. Her face was burning painfully; and that, alas! did not improve her personal appearance. "It is getting very late for Johnnie; and we haven't seen our rooms yet, you know."

"Why do you squash my hand so tight, mother?" asked the little boy, fretfully. "You hurt me."

"I too think Johnnie would be better in bed," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, suddenly. There was rather a dangerous light in her eyes.

"It is some way down to the town," Cecilia went on. "I think we had better start soon."

"We shall see you again, Colonel Enderby," said Mrs. Murray, with much warmth of manner. "I understand you are staying at Terzia."

"Unfortunately, I leave to-morrow," he answered. "But I will give myself the pleasure of calling on you in the morning, if I may."

Directly he had spoken, Philip was aware of having somehow committed an indiscretion. Bertie Ames said "Ah!" softly, under his breath; and Eleanor rustled suggestively.

"Dear me, I am so sorry. I thought, from my nephew's account, you would be here for some time longer. Well, well," Mrs. Murray went on, shaking one fat hand, with its multiplicity of jangling bracelets, at him playfully, "we shall see—we shall see. Perhaps we may make you change your mind, you know, notwithstanding all that good-for-nothing Bertie's sarcasms about old friends."

Then the excellent lady, with many expressions of affection and gratitude for the most delightful of evenings, took leave of her hostess.

"Jessie, go indoors with them," said her step-mother. "See that Mrs. Murray has her cloaks and things. You will pardon my remaining here," she continued, turning to Cecilia. "Bertie, you will take care of your aunt. Antonio can go too, you know, and carry the child."

As Jessie obediently followed in the wake of her step-mother's guests, she passed very close to Philip Enderby. Moved by a momentary feeling, she stopped and looked up at him, with a strange mixture of anger and entreaty in her charming face.

"It is no good, then; you are obdurate, you still mean to go," she said quickly. "I must prepare myself to remain for ever at the little red villa. I make you my curtsy, Colonel Enderby. I have been deceived in you."

The words cut Philip to the quick. The whole meaning and purpose of the man rushed together in one clear, over-mastering

impulse. He stretched out his arms to grasp and keep her.

“Ah, Jessie,” he said—“Jessie, I can’t part with you like this.”

But the girl neither heard nor heeded him. Having delivered her soul of its burden of resentment, she turned and fled. He saw her pale figure drift swiftly across the semi-darkness of the terrace, flash into clearness for an instant in the yellow light of the doorway, and then disappear within the house. To follow her was impossible; it meant coming face to face with that painfully playful old person, Mrs. Murray; it meant making a confession which reason and sentiment alike condemned. He took a long breath; set his teeth; and went back to seal his fate by speaking to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

That lady, meanwhile, had, perhaps fortunately, been too self-occupied to take any note of the little scene between her step-daughter and her guest. She was suffering an *accés* of nervous irritation. She had flung herself down in a wicker-chair beside the table, with its half-empty coffee-cups, and as

Colonel Enderby came up to her she broke out into vehement protest.

“Heaven help us, but what a woman! She is the most abominable old vulgarian. She sets every tooth in my head on edge, and her insinuations are little short of an insult. There is a *mauvaise langue*, if you like! Wretched Cecilia to have such a mother! And really it is too vexatious that Miss Keat should be away just now; it is—— Ah! well—but, Colonel Enderby, tell me, what on earth has made you decide to rush off to Spezia like this, at an hour’s notice?”

As she ceased speaking, Eleanor raised her eyes to Philip’s face. Something in his appearance arrested her attention. He stood still, almost rigid, before her; yet there was a singular intensity and concentration of purpose about him.

The answer to her question came promptly enough.

“You must pardon me, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay; I cannot give you my reasons for going away. But they are imperative, believe me, all the same.”

Her forehead contracted into a frown, half annoyance and half thought.

"I do not understand you."

"I understand myself only too well," answered the Colonel, not without a grain of bitterness.

A sound of footsteps and voices came from the direction of the house. The guests were departing. Then Parker, tall and angular, stalked into the garden.

"If you're going to stay out here, ma'am, any longer," she said, "you must put more on. Mr. Ames sent out this cloak. I meant to bring one out myself, anyway."

Parker's manner towards her mistress was not weighted with any superabundance of ceremony. Their acquaintance dated from the days of sensible nurse and more or less spoilt child, and a savour of that relation survived between them still. Eleanor submitted very readily to have the cloak wrapped about her.

"I suppose I can put out those lantern things?" Parker went on.

"Oh, leave that to Antonio. You can't reach them," answered Eleanor.

The worthy waiting-woman smiled grimly. "I can reach them just as well as Antonio. And he won't be back for the best part of an hour. The candles are burnt right down; they'll set fire to the paper before long."

"Oh, do as you like; you always have your own way in the end, you know."

With that Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay got up.

"Come on to the terrace," she said to Colonel Enderby. "Tell me," she added, as they moved away, "are your reasons for going connected in any way with the people you met here to-night?"

"No, I had decided to go before I saw your guests this evening. I had already mentioned the fact to your daughter."

Eleanor leaned against the low terrace wall.

"This is all very abrupt," she said.

In the garden Parker extinguished the coloured lights one by one. There was something rather fateful about her tall, gaunt form. It was difficult to believe that the harsh-featured, bony woman did not derive a cruel satisfaction from cutting

short the pretty, frivolous, superfluous brilliance of those swaying lights.

Philip watched her in silence for a moment, then he spoke simply and earnestly. The fact that he was sternly putting out all his own gay-coloured hopes, just as Parker yonder was putting out the gay-coloured lanterns, lent a penetrating quality, a ring of simple eloquence to his speech. He alluded to their former conversation; he reminded Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay that she had asked his advice—now he gave it. She had spoken of her step-daughter's future—let her take the young girl home to England, to her own country and kindred, and find a worthy suitor for her there. "Foreigners and half foreigners," he said, "seem to me likely to make very poor sort of husbands." For her own peace of mind, as well as for Jessie's welfare, he urged her to go, and go soon,—to renew intercourse with her own and her husband's relations, to pick up the threads of English life again.

Eleanor listened quietly. When he had finished, she spoke with an air of abstraction.

"That is what you advise, then?"

"Yes, that is what I advise. I have thought the matter over as carefully as I know how. That is what you ought to do."

Eleanor raised her shoulders irritably.

"Oh, you are mistaken—mistaken," she exclaimed.

"No, I am not—I wish I was mistaken," said the Colonel sadly. "I have found the last fortnight very pleasant, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay; it is not to please myself that I go away."

He wanted to enlarge on this text and make a civil speech; but somehow the words stuck in his throat—the speech refused to come off.

Eleanor shook hands with him in silence; then, when he had got a few steps away, she called after him.

"You do not start early to-morrow?"

Colonel Enderby turned back.

"I shall go by the mid-day train," he answered.

At the end of the terrace he took a last look at the Villa Mortelli. The moon had set some while before. The house loomed up a black shapeless mass, with a window

here and there gleaming faintly from light within. The frogs and cicadas had concluded their long concert. Only the muffled roar of the surf sounded up from the beach, and the night wind whispered and rustled among the stiff leaves of the old ilex trees at the near end of the upper vineyard path. Far below, the lights of the town twinkled amid the rich purple obscurity of the night. To Colonel Enderby the last fortnight seemed of the substance of a dream, ethereal, unsubstantial. The pretty play was played out; the curtain had come down; the spectacle was over; the common work-a-day world claimed him as its own once more. He believed, at that moment, that he had said good-bye for ever to all extravagance, whether of joy or sorrow. Wife, child, home—those eternal sources both of purest pleasure and keenest pain, were not for him. He would go away; go back to his soldiering. It had consoled him long ago, perhaps it would contrive to console him again. He thought, with a species of ascetic satisfaction, of the innumerable rows of black huts at Aldershot, of the unlovely barrack

buildings and the church crowning the rising ground, of the bare drab waste of the Long Valley, with its encircling ranges of sombre fir trees and stretches of dark heather.

Henceforth, as far as love and pretty young girls went, he would honestly accept his age and disabilities; he would put that side of things away for ever, and patiently submit to consider himself shelved in questions of the affections.

“Upon my word, though,” he said to himself while walking along the narrow street of Terzia, between the tall frowning houses—“upon my word, I have had a pretty hard day of it.”

Just then Mr. Ames, slim, a shade overdressed, and with an air of exquisite suavity, met him.

“Ah! good-night, Colonel Enderby,” he said. “Is it true that we have the misfortune of losing you so soon? Still, notwithstanding the prospect of parting, I own I am a happy man to-night. I have the heart of a child. I revel in the possession of a clear conscience. After all, what

pleasure is comparable to a sense of accomplished duty?"

Lifting his hat, he passed on, without waiting for any answer.

Philip Enderby had a momentary longing to find himself opposite to Mr. Ames at a distance of twenty paces, with accessories in the form of pistols, seconds, and a surgeon. It made the fact of his renunciation none the easier, that he left that enigmatical young gentleman behind him in full possession at the Villa Mortelli.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. AMES FINDS HIMSELF UNEQUAL TO
THE OCCASION.

WHEN she parted with Colonel Enderby, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay was in a somewhat excited frame of mind. Like many persons of apparently strong will and strong character, she had at bottom a great necessity for moral support; she was, in truth, extremely dependent. She found it impossible to keep things to herself; she was compelled to overflow, so to speak. Very often she made most compromising mistakes by overflowing to quite the wrong person.

She went indoors, and upstairs into the drawing-room, which looked depressing and ghostly in the feeble light of a pair of candles set on the piano. Jessie had been playing earlier in the evening. Some loose

music was scattered about, and a little bouquet of flowers, which Bertie had given the girl when she came down dressed for dinner, lay fading on the turned-back lid above the key-board. Eleanor regarded these indications of her pretty step-daughter's late presence without any very warm signs of maternal, or even step-maternal tenderness. In point of fact, they appeared to aggravate rather than modify her former agitation. She clasped her well-shaped hands together with strong impatient gesture, and began to pace backwards and forwards up and down the whole length of the long room, her black lace mantilla swaying with the alternate drooping and half-angry raising of her head, while the heavy train of her black silk dress made a rasping noise as it dragged over the marble floor.

Mr. Ames came in, after a while, and came in, too, in a charming humour. He even went so far as to hum a few bars from one of Mephistopheles' merry evil-sounding songs in "Faust" as he came upstairs.

"Ah ! dear cousin Nell, you are still up.

This is an unexpected bit of good fortune. Let us talk."

Eleanor glanced at him from under her dark eyebrows. Her nostrils dilated slightly. She looked like a well-bred horse which lays back its ears, half in nervousness and half in viciousness.

"I will sit down, if you don't mind," Bertie continued. "I am slightly exhausted. I see you are walking off the effects of my dear aunt Mrs. Murray's society. It needs walking off, I admit. Don't let me interfere with that salutary process. We can talk just as well so."

"She is a detestable old woman," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay over her shoulder, as she swept up the room again.

"Ah! there you over-shoot the mark," he answered, in a mildly argumentative tone. "She is not detestable; she is only powerful. You are rather powerful too, you know, Eleanor, at times. And two powerful women rarely get on quite happily together. But I am really sorry for my aunt all the same. She compassed sea and land to make good marriages for her

daughters, and now all their highly desirable husbands refuse to have anything to do with her. She has had to fall back on Cecilia. Cecilia has a positive genius for doing her duty."

"I always have thought Cecilia more or less of a fool," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay incisively.

"Yes; but she is a good fool; and that is more or less of a good thing. To-night I love her dearly. She completely routed our valiant Colonel."

Eleanor stopped abruptly in her agitated walk.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed.

Bertie Ames leant back in his chair, rested his elbows on the arms of it, and pressed the tips of his fingers together, with the air of a man who is full of a gracious sense of well-being.

"It was truly refreshing," he said. "It was just one of those delicate little episodes that make life more than endurable for a short period. I guessed a good deal from certain things which my aunt said when we first mentioned Enderby's name. I ascer-

tained that they had not met since the balmy days of youth, and that at that remote epoch he had been seriously smitten with Cecilia. Cecilia had also entertained tender feelings towards him, prior, of course, to her connection with that plausible scapegrace, Farrell. I was grieved to inflict any discomfort on her, poor dear soul; but what would you have? One can't too closely consider everybody."

Eleanor walked on again. Her head was bent; she looked anything but delighted at this little narrative.

"I was sweeter than honey and butter to the Colonel, who, on his part, was not quite as civil as he might have been to me. But I bided my time. I arranged a delicate revenge."

"Revenge?" she interrupted sharply. "Why, what quarrel have you with Colonel Enderby?"

"Oh, no personal quarrel, I assure you. He has the liveliest contempt for me; but I don't mind that—it is a mere matter of temperament. He can no more help it than that nameless but historic person, of

whom we used to be told in our youth, could help his head swelling when he eat gooseberries. I revenged not so much my wretched self, dear cousin Nell, as all unsuccessful, unrespectable, vagabond humanity. I have a large share of those primitive instincts of fallen man which make dirty, worthless, little boys, in the gutter, throw a handful of mud at the nice, clean, well-conducted little boys who roll by them, sitting up in well-appointed carriages. I planned a telling scene. I let the sight of Cecilia burst upon our friend as she was standing talking to Jessie under the orange trees. You can picture the contrast.”—Bertie Ames laughed softly to himself. “It was dramatic. The poor Colonel really behaved very well. But, to use a vulgar phrase, it knocked the wind out of him for a few seconds very effectually.”

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay was at the far end of the room. She spoke with a trace of hesitancy.

“No doubt he felt seeing Cecilia again, under the circumstances. But—I suppose

I am stupid—I confess I don't quite catch the point of the contrast with Jessie."

"Heaven help us, Eleanor, where are your eyes?" cried Mr. Ames, holding up his hands. "Why, poor man, to put it coarsely, he is simply over head and ears in love with Jessie!"

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay came slowly down the length of the room. Again she had that appearance of laying back her ears, and showing the whites of her eyes. As she passed the young man, she said, with something rather forced in the calm of her manner—

"Ah, you think so too, do you? I am glad of that."

There was a moment's silence.

"I don't think that is quite kind of you, cousin Nell," he observed. "Has not Jessie had plenty of victims already? I merely perpetrated a passing practical joke. You go farther, it seems, and with no fair cause. Why should you want the poor man to be tortured?"

"I don't want him to be tortured," she answered, keeping her eyes fixed on the

floor. "I have the highest regard for Colonel Enderby. I desire earnestly to secure his happiness."

Bertie Ames remained very still. The air of enjoyment had pretty well died out of his face.

"Pardon me," he said, "but would you mind sitting down, Eleanor? The scraping of your dress is getting a little on to my nerves. It confuses me. I confess, for example, I don't clearly apprehend the meaning of your last speech."

As he spoke Mr. Ames looked very full at his companion.

Strong as Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay might appear, this man certainly exercised a remarkable influence over her. She knew quite well that the die was cast, and that a dangerous and painful scene lay before her—how dangerous and painful it might prove she could not as yet determine; but that it would tax her courage and fortitude pretty severely she was already sure. In her present state of hardly repressed excitement, it would be far easier to her to say what must be said moving to and

fro. Yet when Mr. Ames looked steadily at her, and pointed to the sofa opposite to him, she wavered only for a moment, and then sat down.

“That is better,” he murmured. “I am idiotic, no doubt, but I repeat, I do not clearly understand what you mean.”

Eleanor leant back among the large sofa cushions. Movement and feeling had brought a glow of colour into her cheeks. In her rich elaborate black gown, with the soft lace falling back from her dusky hair, she was undoubtedly a strikingly handsome and distinguished-looking woman. Physically she gave way before her companion, a nervous tremor shook her; but mentally she hardened herself against his influence. She half shut her eyes, and clasped her hands tightly together as they lay on her lap.

“I intend to encourage Colonel Enderby,” she said slowly. “To be quite frank with you, I wish to secure Jessie’s future, and I believe that he would make her an admirable husband.”

Bertie Ames did not move; but he turned very pale indeed.

"Ah!" he said, with a queer shuddering intonation. It was something like the cry of an animal in pain.

Eleanor sat up quickly. She raised her hands and tore open the lace at her throat. She wanted air, she felt as though she would stifle. It was dreadful to her to see this man suffer—but it was almost equally dreadful to perceive why he suffered.

"Don't take it like that, Bertie," she cried, with sudden violence. "It is hideous. You will drive me mad."

Bertie Ames hardly heeded her outburst. He smiled a little. Eleanor covered her eyes. His poor white face and that pitiful mockery of a smile turned her faint.

"I understand perfectly well now, thank you, Nell," he said gently. "I flattered myself I was prepared for most things; but one's imagination, I observe, has a habit of just missing what is most probable. One's philosophy, too, fails at critical moments. It enables one to bear imaginary evils perfectly well. It is not so successful with real evils. Well, I own myself beaten.

You are the cleverer of the two by a very long way. I had not thought of this combination. Jessie's future demands a victim, of course—but I am to be tortured this time, I see, not Colonel Enderby."

"What could I do?" she exclaimed. "I have suspected—feared how things were going with you; but I did not dream it had gone as far as this. And then," she added, with a sort of gasp, "it may come to nothing, after all."

"I don't think so," the young man answered, with that same wretched smile. "Everything will turn out as you wish—at least, if you keep on."

"I must keep on," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

She threw back her head; her face was hard and set. Then almost immediately she softened again into a tone of pleading, with a wild longing to justify herself, to prove that her motives were commendable.

"I do it for the best, Bertie. I believe it is right. It seems the safest thing I can do for the child. And who can care for her happiness as nearly as I? Am I not, after

all, practically her mother?—mustn't I know best?—mustn't I be most capable of judging? Do you think I could be so base and faithless as to do this thing lightly or thoughtlessly? I have prayed, I have prayed over it—God wouldn't be so cruel as to let me make a mistake? I have implored for guidance."

Mr. Ames laughed. It was not an agreeable laugh exactly.

"Oh! in that case, I, of course, have nothing further to say. If the Higher Powers have been duly consulted, persons such as I am are out of it, clearly. Still you may pity me just a little, cousin Nell," he went on. "It was my last hope. I hardly allowed that it amounted to a hope even. It was the remotest of chances; but just a chance still. Jessie is so young. I fancied, perhaps, the luck would turn; that something might possibly happen if we could only wait."

Eleanor's expression hardened again perceptibly. If he suffered, at least she suffered too.

"Really," he said, after a minute or two,

“my position is a singularly graceful one, now I come to think of it. I have been cherishing a secret desire during the last few months for nothing less than the death of a woman I adored for years—a woman who gave me all she had to give.” Bertie paused. “Now the news that she has developed some fatal malady would give me—well, not unmixed pain. Isn’t that charming?”

“You make yourself out far worse than you are,” she interrupted.

“No, I think not. I appear to be a very despicable animal, and let me at least be honest and admit it. The best thing about me has been my faithfulness to the memory of what was, in itself, a far from pretty thing—Enderby, for instance, would cover it by a very ugly word. But even that last shred of honourable feeling has worn uncommonly threadbare in the past twelve months.”

“Jessie would not make you happy,” said Eleanor, hoarsely. “I have watched her from babyhood. There are strange wants in her nature.”

"Ah! if I am to wait for a wife till I find a faultless woman, I shall wait through all eternity," he responded. "'One man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.'"

"Where did you get that abominable sentiment from?" demanded Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

"Out of that very acute book, the Bible, cousin Nell. They are the words of a person who is reputed to have had a pretty wide experience of women. My French novels, that you sometimes gird at, say the same thing, only they put it in less conventional language. I am as well aware of Jessie's peculiarities as you are; but I should understand her. I should never ask of her what she could not give. I should be contented with very little—from Jessie."

"You would quarrel," she said bitterly.

"Yes," he answered, "it is a way husbands and wives have. Everybody knows that. Still, that knowledge has never lowered the marriage returns very sensibly yet, I believe."

Eleanor flung herself back against the sofa-cushions. "He loves her—he loves her," she repeated to herself, and the words stabbed her as she said them.

Mr. Ames got up; he came across to the sofa and sat down by his cousin. His face was very pale still—it looked ghastly with his black beard and great, sad, dark eyes—but he had regained much of his usual indolent manner.

"Come, let us talk over this matter reasonably, Eleanor, without any heroics. We both admit that Jessie has certain peculiarities which may prove difficult to deal with. A man will have to pay a certain penalty for loving her."

"Colonel Enderby will love her too well to be conscious of the penalty," she interrupted.

"At first, yes. But remember he is five-and-twenty years older than she is, at least, and he has lived in an utterly different world to hers. He will worship her, he will be incapable of looking at her from a common-sense point of view—looking at her as she really is. He will make her into an

idol. Some day something will happen which makes a demand upon her. She will fail him. He is a fine fellow, in a way, though a stupid one. He will blame himself, and forgive her. It will happen a second time. And then shall I tell you what he will do? He'll just quietly go and blow his brains out. The man is incapable of adjusting himself, he moves all of a piece. He is a rigid English Puritan, you know, at bottom."

"You don't mean to insinuate anything against Jessie?" cried Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, her eyes blazing with a sudden burst of jealousy for the girl's honour.

"Heaven forbid! Jessie will never commit any of those indiscretions that society judges very harshly."

There was a silence: then Bertie Ames bent towards his cousin and looked at her very steadily.

"What are you going to do—let him go away to-morrow?"

She looked back at him with an expression of passionate anguish and despair in her handsome face.

“He must go if he will. But I shall make him distinctly understand my wishes as to Jessie’s future first.”

Bertie placed his hand on Eleanor’s two hands as they lay clasped in her lap. The hot colour rushed into her face, she closed her eyes with a swift shiver, which trembled all through her frame.

“Nell,” he said softly, “think a moment. Are you quite determined?”

“Yes, yes,” she cried wildly, shaking off his hand. “Utterly determined; irrevocably determined. Jessie must go—she must go. It must be done at once.”

“Very well,” he answered.

Then he got up slowly from the sofa.

“It is very late,” he went on. “You had better go to bed. Shall I get you a candle?”

“Bertie, Bertie,” cried Mrs. Pierce-Dawney in desperation, stretching out her hands to him, “for God’s sake, don’t hate me!”

“Oh! my dear, I don’t hate you,” he replied wearily. “You have been wonderfully kind to me, and have borne with me

with a great deal of patience at times when I must have been anything but pleasant company. It would be detestably ungrateful to hate you. No, I haven't fallen into that depth yet. And perhaps you are right; perhaps it is all, as you say, for the best. Only it is a little difficult for me to take an optimist's view of the matter just at present. I can't help thinking of myself first, you know. It is a tendency inherent in human nature; we all have it in our degree, saints and sinners alike."

He looked down on the ground, and shrugged his shoulders in a lazy hopeless sort of fashion.

"I think, sometimes, I am like a living man bound to a corpse. It is not a graceful metaphor, but it just expresses my sensations. Lately I have had an insane hope of getting free from the corpse; but I tied the cords myself, and I tied them a little too cleverly. I shall never get free—never. That makes a man a trifle irritable at times." He glanced up at her suddenly, with a lifting of the eyebrows and a short laugh. "I and the corpse always," he said,

“right on to the end—and then beyond, probably blank darkness and nothing. Delightful company, isn’t it? Cheering prospect for a healthy man of three-and-thirty?”

There were noble impulses in Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay. She had a movement of reckless magnanimity.

“Your sense of honour is overstrained,” she said, and as she spoke no thought of self was present to her mind. “It is false. Go away, Bertie; go away out of this beautiful baleful country, which bewitches and perverts us all—go away and begin over again.”

She had risen to her feet. She looked almost majestic in her dark stormy beauty, standing there in front of him.

In how far the young man had realized the nature of her feelings towards himself, I cannot say. That he had a suspicion of them is pretty certain; for it is impossible that a woman should love a man deeply without betraying herself to him in a thousand little ways. But Bertie Ames was not without gracious and respectful

sentiments towards certain persons, notwithstanding his cynicism, real or affected. He had avoided examining his cousin's feelings on that special point very discreetly and modestly. At this moment, however, he was guilty of an act of cruelty ; but then, in extenuation of that act, it must be allowed, poor fellow, that he was very sore at heart. To Eleanor's magnanimous outburst, he answered, smiling—

“ That is all very well, but I am not fond of solitary journeys. A new heaven and earth seem to demand an Eve as well as an Adam. Who shall go forth with me?—Jessie ? ”

Eleanor shrank back as if he had struck her. The glow of generous enthusiasm died out of her face, leaving it thin and haggard. She had to steady herself with her hands on the arm of the sofa.

“ I beg your pardon,” he resumed hastily, filled with sudden compunction. “ I forgot myself ; I oughtn't to have said that. But don't, for heaven's sake, turn devil's advocate and tempt me. You know just as well as I do that that sense of honour—

call it false and overstrained if you will—is the one thing that keeps me from going utterly to the bad, and gives me some kind of self-respect. Without it I should be worth nothing at all; I am worth little enough as it is. I may be superstitious; but I don't much fancy any fresh start would be very successful which began with the throwing of that poor old rag of honour overboard."

Eleanor was silent. Bertie went across the room, lighted one of the chamber candles standing on the consol-table by the door, and brought it to her. Small everyday needs must be supplied, and small civilities complied with, even when poor human hearts are torn and bleeding. The outward decencies of civilization take no note of the more intimate emotions.

As Mr. Ames gave his cousin her candle, and the light of it fell upon her face, he was moved with compassion towards her.

"You look terribly tired, Eleanor," he said kindly.

His friendly solicitude was, perhaps, even harder to bear than his indifference.

Eleanor felt ill; she was chilled through, though the night was warm. She, too, was bound, she feared—bound hard and fast and everlastingly to the corpse of a dead love.

“Yes, I am tired,” she answered hopelessly—“tired of my life.”

Bertie smiled at her kindly again, and raised his hands with a deprecating gesture.

“So am I, cousin Nell,” he said, “abominably tired of it. But you and I are cultivated persons, so we won’t take any violent measures to rid ourselves of that fatiguing possession, will we? In face of the blank darkness I alluded to just now, it might be a mistake. We’ll leave all such desperate doings to highly respectable barbarians, like our friend the worthy Colonel. Good night. Mind you don’t slip on the landing;—the floor is just like ice there, outside.”

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